

Translating the Sacred in the Nordic-Baltic Sphere (Riga, 16–17 Jun 22)

Art Academy of Latvia & Latvian Academy of Sciences, Riga, Latvia, Jun 16–17, 2022

Deadline: Oct 29, 2021

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Marie Curie Symposium: Translating the Sacred in the Nordic-Baltic Sphere from the Middle Ages to Modernity.

This 2-day symposium explores the historical capacity of sacred objects to enable the movement of ideas, styles, practices, and beliefs from place to place. Taking as its point of departure the dual global-material turn in the humanities, the symposium will interrogate the agentive and mediating properties of sacred things as composite objects (“objets croisés”) transmitted, transformed, and translated from the late Middle Ages through the Modern era within and between communities and territories in the Nordic-Baltic sphere (broadly speaking comprising areas of present-day Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Iceland, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, Belarus, Ukraine, Russia, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia). Historically, this region represents an integrated and culturally heterogeneous maritime space, its territories and communities mutually and globally interconnected over centuries by trade, imperial expansion, immigration, and religious pluralism. These conditions drove circulations, transformations and entanglements of visual and material cultures, and ideologies, practices, and theologies of the sacred both amongst and within historical territories, through exchanges, migrations, conflicts, and transformations both synchronic and diachronic.

Within this context and the field of object studies, sacred things occupy a particularly complex position as a sub-group of objects, including (but not limited to) sacral structures, devotional and cult images and statues, relics and reliquaries, liturgical and devotional accessories and instruments, as well as particular material instantiations of iconographies and symbolisms of sacred motifs and figures that manifested certain beliefs. Their powerful agency within and between Nordic-Baltic societies, issuing from their status as mediators, thresholds, and conductors between worldly and otherworldly realms, makes them an especially productive target for analysis.

However, the crucial mediating role of the sacred in Nordic-Baltic cultures and societies remains persistently understudied, particularly in the fields of art history and visual-material studies. Despite the fact that the region’s sacral material culture has essentially constituted communal identity formation, manifests diversity in terms of affiliation and typology, and migrated in different physical and ideological forms within and between cultures, the entangled translational histories of sacred things remain largely unexplored. When they are included in scholarly accounts of Baltic-Nordic history, these are largely divided along latter-day modern national lines, and tend to relegate these objects to an illustrative rather than agentive role, i.e. showing rather than driving

changes and transformations. Additionally, comparative approaches tend to perpetuate a paradigm where different cultures appear as parallel but separate fields of inquiry.

The symposium aims to foster a transdisciplinary conversation around these issues, building on approaches that understand movement, transformation, and liminality as part of an object's meaning, exploring the multiple ways movement of things, persons, and ideas could be materially and metaphorically embedded in these objects, through motifs, function, contents, techniques, and materials. The symposium invites contributions that, through case studies, critically explore the entangled translational histories of sacred things in the region over the *longue durée*, considering how the migrations of sacral material culture in different forms manifests diversity in terms of affiliation and typology and essentially constituted communal identity formation. Particularly welcome are case studies that reflect on methods of exploring layered approaches to sacred things as as thresholds, barriers, and/or nodes composed of layered accretions traceable to particular contexts. Likewise of interest are papers that map microhistories of translated sacred things to elicit mechanisms structuring broader Nordic-Baltic relations, and weigh transhistorical and -geographical perspectives to challenge prior periodization and national paradigms in various historical traditions in a range of historical disciplines.

Proposals may consider, but also go beyond, the following topics:

- patrons soliciting sacral artworks from one territory for export to another;
- aspects of confessionalization and interconfessional exchange of phenomena in art, architecture and ritual practices;
- elements of secularization over the *longue durée* and in the modern era;
- interactions between theological doctrines and art;
- modifications to or destruction of existing material cultures of the sacred as manifestation of moving and/or changing ideas;
- migrating artists and architects transporting not only materials and physical things, but also forms and iconographies for concretizing the sacred in new contexts;
- saints' relics and their attending reliquary containers ritually translated and traded as diplomatic agents between regional elites;
- cases of misapprehension, anxiety, misinterpretations and outright rejection of other cultural forms;
- material and visual instantiations of saints' cults undergoing transformations over space and time, entailing identity formation and access to the divine, mythologizations of notions of local and national communal selfhood and shifting conceptualizations of the numinous, and discursive embodiments of national, ethnocultural and local heroism;
- theoretical and methodological reflections on how religious and art historians of the region can secure the inclusion of the Nordic-Baltic world in global narratives, how the study of the region might change by further embracing the global turn, and what specific methods best suit the areas of study and do justice to its historical complexities.

Proposals from PhD students and early career researchers are welcome. Please send an abstract of up to 350 words and a 150-word biographical statement in a single document to rno@natmus.dk by 29 October 2021. Papers should be 20 minutes in length.

Funding is available to cover speakers' accommodations and meals during the symposium; limited funds may be available to supplement travel costs. Please indicate in your abstract submission if you would require travel funding support to attend. Following the symposium, papers will

be published in a peer-reviewed edited anthology with a leading international academic press.

This 2-day symposium has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No. 842830 for the project TRANSLATIO—The art of (re)moving relics and reforming holiness in Europe's borderlands. It is jointly hosted by the National Museum of Denmark, Art Academy of Latvia, and Latvian Academy of Sciences, and co-organized by Dr. Ruth Sargent Noyes (National Museum of Denmark), Prof. Dr. Habil. Ojārs Spāritis (Art Academy of Latvia), Dr. Martin Wangsgaard Jürgensen (National Museum of Denmark).

The symposium will take place on 16–17 June 2022 in Riga (Latvia), in conjunction with the annual conference of the Doctoral Studies Program of the Art Academy of Latvia, with the possibility of becoming a virtual event should circumstance warrant.

Reference:

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