

MATERIALITY AND RELIGIOUS PRACTICE II: SACRED OBJECTS AND THE REFORMATION

Seminar, Aarhus University
Research Program Materials, Culture and Heritage

Thursday 21 April 2016, Moesgård, Lecture Hall, 4206-139



13:00. Welcome and Introduction

13:15. Michael Lewis,
British Museum:

*Limoges Enamels: Insights through
Medieval Objects found through Metal-
Detecting in England*

14:00. Break

14:20. Rainer Atzbach,
Aarhus University:

*Protestant Iconoclasm in
Archaeological Contexts
– Between Controlled Destruction and
Religious Furor*

14:50. Mette Svart Kristiansen,
Aarhus University:

Holy Objects, Fakes and Souvenirs

15:20. Discussion and End of seminar

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In this second seminar in the series “Materiality and Religious Practice” hosted by the research program Materials, Culture and Heritage, we will address the question of the effect of religious change on religious material culture by focusing on the Reformation in Denmark, England, and Germany from an archaeological perspective. The religious objects used by the lay and clerical members of the Roman Catholic Church throughout the Middle Ages were more than representations of the divine or tools for the performance of the liturgy – they mediated the believer’s religious experience by making the impalpable reality of God reachable through a physical form, which could be touched and seen. Matter itself, in the form of relics, could perform miracles. The idea that the physical should be distinguished from the spiritual was first introduced with the Lutheran Reformation, and led to dramatic alterations of the Christian material culture. Yet objects maintained an important role in the faith, no longer in the form of rich reliquaries and ostentatious saints’ figures, but in other aspects of the religious experience. With this seminar we hope to discuss the significance of material culture for the religious experience by considering how its sacredness, its very *raison d’être*, was challenged to the point that it became irrelevant, destroyed, forgotten, or translated into new meanings.

13:00. Welcome and Introduction

13:15. Michael Lewis, Head of Portable Antiquities & Treasure, British Museum

Limoges Enamels: Insights through Medieval Objects found through Metal-Detecting in England

Enamelled copper-alloy objects made in Limoges, France, are intriguing detector finds, though relatively common discoveries in England. Most are from larger religious objects, including processional crosses, caskets and reliquaries, demonstrating the richness and colour of the medieval parish church. However their discovery (in the plough-soil) is witness to a more traumatic life-story, when these items (it seems) were deliberately broken up and cast away during the English Reformation. This talk will look at these objects as both objects of art, but also as clues for understanding religious reform and the development of the historic landscape.

14:00. Break

14:20. Rainer Atzbach, Associate Professor, Aarhus University:

Protestant Iconoclasm in Archaeological Contexts – Between Controlled Destruction and Religious Furor

Reformation had a deep impact on the material culture of religiosity. This became visible in controlled or uncontrolled iconoclasm against sculptures in the public space. This paper seeks to explore chances and limits of archaeological research in religious behavior during the 16th century of confessionalization on the basis of examples from Denmark and Germany.

14:50. Mette Svart Kristiansen, Associate Professor, Aarhus University:

Holy Objects, Fakes and Souvenirs

During the Reformation objects became a central battlefield of Catholics and Protestants, and the meaning and properties of religious objects were contested and redefined. This paper presents some examples of object biographies during the Reformation, for example the Hedwig cup and other objects related to Luther’s life, and the use of objects in constructing narratives of the past and the future in a intertwined intersection of the sacred and profane.

15:20. Discussion and End of seminar

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