

## BOOK REVIEWS

**Anna Pawlik, *Das Bildwerk als Reliquiar? Funktionen früher Großplastik im 9. Bis 11. Jahrhundert*, Petersberg: Michael Imhof Verlag, 2013**

Whether or not a principal function of figural sculptures in the round from the Carolingian, Ottonian, and Salian periods was to store relics has long engaged scholars. In 1951, Harald Keller influentially argued that the resurgence of sculptures in the round could be tied to their use as reliquaries<sup>1</sup>. With a sacred purpose, sculptural reliquaries were sheltered from the suspicions associated with pagan idols, which had been severely condemned since the early days of Christianity. Subsequent scholars have embraced, qualified, or refuted Keller's thesis in any number of ways. Pawlik enters into this long-lived debate with eyes wide open, approaching the question from a broad perspective that respects the unique qualities of all forty-seven of the objects that form the core of her study. The author consistently offers circumspect analyses and sober conclusions. At no point does the reader feel that Pawlik manipulates her evidence at the service of advancing a thesis. Rather, the author fundamentally respects her physical and textual objects of study with all their thorny particularities.

No surprise, then, that the catalog of works that appends Pawlik's study is one of the most valuable contributions. Each entry features detailed descriptions of an object, a list and transcription of medieval sources relevant to the work, and bibliographies. In addition, this section includes wonderful photographs, including many useful details of objects. Pawlik has provided a great service to scholars in assembling so much information in such a user-friendly format.

The main body of the text attempts to assess what conclusions can be drawn from these works of art. After an introduction that offers an extremely useful overview of the relevant scholarship, Pawlik examines the physical evidence of surviving works. Throughout, she demonstrates admirable attention to questions of technique and materials, with occasional commentaries on social meanings. She provides troves of data, such as the fact that only nine early crucifixes are "lifesize" – i.e., between 162 and

192 cm in height – and most are smaller, ranging between 116.8 and 141 cm in height. Included within these discussions is an excursus on the structural organization of medieval workshops. Pawlik notes that there is simply too little information available to offer specific details on how artistic production was organized. Rather, she suggests more broadly that the rise of urban centers during the ninth through eleventh centuries fostered *Produktionsverhältnisse*. Pawlik does not acknowledge the Marxist legacy of this notion, but rather takes it more at face value, asserting that cities were better suited to supporting the specialization of trades, including the visual arts, than were rural settings. A number of recent historical studies by German scholars are cited in support of this assertion.

Pawlik's second chapter provides a brief overview of what can be gleaned from the types of written sources that mention sculptures, including chronicles, hagiographic texts, treasury inventories, ordinals, and late-medieval indulgences. The author concludes by identifying a "flexible Begrifflichkeit" among sources that makes it extremely difficult to specify the function and other aspects of sculptures. For example, she notes that *icona* can refer to both two-dimensional and three-dimensional works. (Such observations will be familiar to any scholar of medieval art.)

The third chapter considers the liturgical context for sculptures, approaching it from three perspectives: the relics objects house, the placement and liturgical uses of sculptures, and the reception of works. The author begins by observing the patterns that surviving evidence suggest, specifically that all Crucifixes contain relics of men, whereas images of the Madonna contained relics of both sexes. She then focuses largely on case studies, including a Crucifix at Hildesheim and the Gero Crucifix in Cologne. The final section of this chapter briefly examines inscriptions that, the author argues, offer insight into the status of sculpture and can serve a reliquary function, as well as serve as a witness to relics. This latter notion is intriguing, but it remains little developed.

In a final brief chapter, Pawlik ultimately answers the question she poses in her volume with something of a jein: sometimes early sculptures were clearly reliquaries, sometimes clearly not. More significant, Pawlik sees urban centers in Germany, including Cologne, Essen, and Paderborn, as playing a generative role in the use of sculpture in Christian cult practices, some of which endure to this day. This

argument could have been profitably expanded. Might, say, aspects of the urban environment help explain features of liturgical sculptures? Thanks to recent work of art and architectural historians (e.g. Maria Georgopoulou, Marcia Kupfer, Robert Maxwell, Linda Seidel) – a literature that Pawlik by and large does not engage – we increasingly have a deeper understanding of the complexities of the medieval cityscape.

This book began as a dissertation, defended in 2011 under Werner Jacobsen at Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität in Münster, and it retains qualities of a thesis, both good and ill. It is thoroughly documented, with more than one thousand extensive footnotes supporting the body of the text. Even so, most of the secondary literature is in German; a few classic studies in other languages, such as Ilene Forsyth's study on throne of wisdom sculptures in Romanesque France, are briefly engaged, but recent scholarship in English, French, Italian, and Spanish is virtually absent. This is unfortunate, as there have been many important publications on relics and reliquaries, including the exhibition catalogue, *Treasures of Heaven: Saints, Relics, and Devotion in Medieval Europe* (Martina Bagnoli et al., Walters Art Museum, Baltimore: 2011), which helps to situate the function of relics *vis-à-vis* the work of art over the *longue durée* of Christian practice. Absent, too, are important studies of art, relics, and liturgy by Cynthia Hahn, Dominique Iogna-Prat, Eric Palazzo, Erik Thunø, and many others. In general, there is little attempt to engage broader and more recent art historical questions, including the material turn in the humanities that has been inspired in large part by the work of Caroline Walker Bynum.

In sum, Pawlik engages the question she poses with admirable depth, but in a rather narrow fashion. The role of urbanism that Pawlik considers throughout her text might offer one productive avenue for further research. This is, of course, only one possible line of inquiry. Indeed, Pawlik's scrupulous study has put us in a very secure position to ask questions beyond that posed in its title, which is arguably one of its greatest contributions.

1 Harald Keller, "Zur Entstehung der sakralen Vollskulptur in der ottonischen Zeit", in *Festschrift für Hans Jantzen*, Kurt Bauch ed., Berlin 1951, pp. 71–91.

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