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The Hammer: Reliquary and Prop as Liminal Objects in Medieval and Early Modern Ritual Performances and Passion Plays

Preface: ›Luther's Hammer‹ on the Stage of Paintings

Perhaps more than any other ordinary object, the hammer has long been associated with performativity and action and invested with metaphorical power. It is therefore no coincidence that the motif of the hammer was used in the branding of the three-part special exhibition on the occasion of the 500th jubilee of the Reformation, in 2017 (fig. 1).[1] The choice was justified with the assertion that this tool encapsulated the exhibition's title, *Die volle Wucht der Reformation* (The Full Power of the Reformation), in one concise motif and, as an attribute »inseparable from Martin Luther and his posting of the theses,« referred to him in the form of a pars pro toto.[2]

Despite the three awards granted to the design company in favor of the concept – the renowned Red Dot Award, the German Design Award, and the iF DESIGN AWARD 2017 – not everyone involved in the exhibitions was equally convinced by the selection and justification of this motif. The hammer drove a figurative hatchet between the advertising professionals and the academics responsible for the exhibi-

1 *Der Luthereffekt. 500 Jahre Protestantismus in der Welt*, ed. by Katrin Ziesak et al., exh.-cat. Berlin, Martin-Gropius-Bau, Munich 2017; *Luther und die Deutschen*, ed. by Christian Heger et al., exh.-cat. Eisenach, Wartburg, Petersberg 2017; *Luther! 95 Schätze, 95 Menschen*, ed. by Mirko Gutjahr et al., exh.-cat. Lutherstadt Wittenberg, Augusteum, Munich 2017.

2 URL: https://kleinerundbold.com/aktuelles/meldungen/der-hammer-die-visuelle-klammer-der-nationalen-sonderausstellungen-2017; cf. https://www.3xhammer.de/de/index.html [last accessed: 21st July 2021].

1. Advertising poster *Die volle Wucht der Reformation – 3 x hammer.de*, exhibitions in Berlin, Eisenach, and Lutherstadt Wittenberg, 2017

tions conception and realization.[3] The latter vehemently emphasized that the logo was simply unsuitable for representing the Reformation, as it narrowed the focus to the person of Luther (1483–1546), and more importantly, they pointed out, the hammering of the Ninety-Five Theses had most likely never happened.[4] The idea of hammering the theses to the door of the Wittenberg Castle Church – an idea anchored in today's collective memory – stems rather from the nineteenth century's ideologically biased historiography, tradition of history painting, and general heroization of Luther.[5] Indeed,

3 Aleida Assmann, Was ist so schlimm an einem Hammer?, in: *Rotary Magazin für Deutschland und Österreich* 1 (2017), URL: https://rotary.de/gesellschaft/was-ist-so-schlimm-an-einem-hammer-a-10106.html [last accessed: 21st July 2021]; cf. Alexander Schunka, Luther's Hammers. German Academic Historiography and Popular Memory of the Reformation in the Context of its 2017 Anniversary, in: *Journal of the Early Modern Christianity* 7 (2020), pp. 201–216.

4 Joachim Ott (ed.), *Luthers Thesenanschlag – Faktum oder Fiktion*, Leipzig 2008; first concerns already in: Erwin Iserloh, Luthers Thesenanschlag – Tatsache oder Legende, in: *Trierer Theologische Zeitschrift* 70 (1961), pp. 303–312.

5 Volker Leppin, »Nicht seine Person, sondern die Wahrheit zu verteidigen.« Die Legende vom Thesenanschlag in lutherischer Historiographie und Memoria, in: Heinz Schilling and Anne Mittelhammer

2. Ferdinand Pauwels, *Luthers Thesenanschlag*, 1872, Wartburg-Stiftung Eisenach, Kunstsammlung, M 0121

it was on the occasion of the 300th jubilee of the Reformation in 1817 that the theologian was first depicted with a hammer. While the engraver responsible, Friedrich Rosmäsler (1775–1858), opted for an unspectacular and historically plausible depiction, a theatrical variant later emerged.[6] Around 1872, the history painter Ferdinand Pauwels (1830–1904) staged the protagonist against a simplified backdrop with spectators looking on (fig. 2).[7] With his arm outstretched, Luther points with the hammer directly at the theses affixed to the church door behind him. Since the moment depicted is one in which the hammer is no longer striking, it proves to be less a functional tool than an instrument of reference: on the one hand, it acts as a pointer that directs, to

(eds.), *Der Reformator Martin Luther 2017. Eine wissenschaftliche und gedenkpolitische Bestandsaufnahme*, Berlin 2014, pp. 85–108.

6 Friedrich Rosmäsler, Thesenanschlag, in: H. G. Kreussler, *Denkmäler der Reformation der christlichen Kirche*, Leipzig 1817; URL: https://asset.museum-digital.org/bawue/images/import_58/201705/14093354983.jpg [last accessed: 21st July 2021].

7 Cf. Henrike Holsing, Luther Thesenanschlag im Bild, in: Ott 2008 (note 4), pp. 141–172.

the white sheets of the theses, the gaze of the public represented in the painting as well as that of the external viewer; on the other hand, in a symbolic sense, it refers to the Reformation as a whole, which ostensibly commenced with this action. It was precisely this painting that marked the beginning of the emblematic consolidation of the sixteenth-century religious and social movement into a single motif, the hammer, a consolidation whose impact still resonated in the 2017 exhibitions. Nevertheless, despite the absence of historical facts, this choice of motif must still be surprising in regard of its polyvalence of meanings and connotations. But what exactly are they, and how did they take shape historically?

The Hammer: A Range of Cultural Meanings and Connotations in Premodern Times

Based on its material, formal, and functional properties and in the sense of affordance theory, the hammer constantly offers new possibilities for its use.[8] From a larger cultural and art-historical perspective, the hammer appears as an attribute for divine figures such as Hephaistos, Vulcan, and Minerva; biblical persons like Tubal-Cain, mentioned in Genesis (4:22); and historical martyrs and saints like Adrian, Ampelius, Apelles of Genoa, Bernward of Hildesheim, Crispin, Dunstan, Galmier of Lyon, Margaret of Antioch, Marinus of San Marino, Reinoldus of Cologne / Dortmund, Theodore of Octodurum, and William of Norwich. The tool also serves to identify professional groups, including sculptors and other artists as well as blacksmiths and bronze casters; based on these associations, the hammer also accompanies personifications of architecture, sculpture, fortitude, patience, penance, tribulation, and fate, just to name a few.[9] Where the hammer is found, there is action, power, and strength, art and craft, even creation itself, if one considers the notion of *natura artifex*, a female personification of nature creating animals and humans; moreover, the very ›invention‹ of music is attributed to Pythagoras's hearing four hammers in a

8 James Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*, London 1986; Richard Fox, Diamantis Panagiotopoulos, and Christina Tsouoaropoulo, Affordanz, in: Thomas Meier, Michael R. Ott, and Rebecca Sauer (eds.), *Materiale Textkulturen. Konzepte – Materialien – Praktiken*, Berlin / Boston, MA 2015, pp. 63–70.

9 A cultural history of the hammer does not exist, see only: Lotti L. H. van Looveren, Hammer, in: Engelbert Kirschbaum and Wolfgang Braunfels (eds.), *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie*, vol. 2, Freiburg im Breisgau 1970, col. 211; David Bosworth and Eric Ziolkowski, Hammer, in: Dale C. Allison et al. (eds.), *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception*, vol. 11, Berlin / Boston, MA 2015, col. 116–146.

3. Jael kills Sisera with a hammer, Paris, ca. 1244–1254, New York, J. P. Morgan Library, Ms M. 638, fol. 12v

workshop.[10] But there is also destruction and slaying, as in the Old Testament story of Jael and Sisera (Judges 4:17–24) (fig. 3).[11] In Judaism, the hammer was considered an unclean object, precisely because of the noisy, physical work associated with it.[12] It is therefore significant that the building of Solomon's Temple proceeded without noise: »[…] so that neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron was heard in the house while it was being built« (1 Kings 6:7). In medieval and early modern times at least, the hammer was nearly always shown in specific relation to the human body, and vice

10 Mechthild Modersohn, *Natura als Göttin im Mittelalter. Ikonographische Studien zu Darstellungen der personifizierten Natur*, Berlin 1997; Barbara Münxelhaus, *Pythagoras Musicus. Zur Rezeption der pythagoreischen Musiktheorie als quadrivialer Wissenschaft im lateinischen Mittelalter*, Bonn 1976; Gene H. Anderson, Pythagoras and the Origin of Music Theory, in: *Indiana Theory Review* 6 (1983), pp. 35–61.

11 Peter Scott Brown, *The Riddle of Jael. The History of a Poxied Heroine in Medieval and Renaissance Art and Culture*, Leiden / Boston, MA 2018.

12 Bosworth / Ziolkowski 2015 (note 9), col. 117.

versa; hardly any depiction exists without a person holding it.[13] Body and object seem sometimes to merge, especially when the hammer is treated as an extension of the hand – far beyond its functional, technical use – and thus as having the capacity to emphasize the action itself in a very direct manner.[14] This capacity becomes particularly evident in cases where the hammer is shown engaged in ritual and performative actions.[15]

Moreover, the hammer is capable of deforming or transforming not only materials and artefacts but also the person who handles it, as Bruno Latour, for instance, described: »[…] thanks to the hammer, I become literally another man, a man who has become ›other‹ […]. Those who believe that tools are simple utensils have never held a hammer in their hand, have never allowed themselves to recognize the flux of possibilities that they are suddenly able to envisage.«[16] The phenomenon he alludes to, namely the role played by material objects in social, ritual, and performative practices, has been elaborated in performance and ritual studies, cultural anthropology, and art history: through their use in rituals or ceremonies, religious plays, and even theater,[17] objects can signal a transitional, transformative phase (liminality) between a before and an after.[18] Interestingly, as shown in the studies of Erika Fischer-Lichte, this process applies similarly to the audience attending the ritual or

13 The discussion can be found in reference to attributes in: Michel Pastoureau and Olga Vassilieva-Codognet (eds.), *Des signes dans l'image. Usages et fonctions de l'attribut dans l'iconographie médiévale (du Concile de Nicée au Concile de Trente)*, Turnhout 2014; Nikolaus Dietrich, *Das Attribut als Problem. Eine bildwissenschaftliche Untersuchung zur griechischen Kunst*, Berlin / Boston, MA 2018.

14 Gottfried Korff, »Schmerzlose Körperteile«? Volkskundliche Bemerkungen zu Aby Warburgs Anthropologie des »Geräts«, in: Philippe Cordez and Matthias Krüger (eds.), *Werkzeuge und Instrumente*, Berlin 2012, pp. 129–149.

15 For the terms cf. Erika Fischer-Lichte, Performance, Inszenierung, Ritual. Zur Klärung kulturwissenschaftlicher Schlüsselbegriffe, in: Jürgen Martschukat and Steffen Patzold (eds.), *Geschichtswissenschaft und »performative turn«. Ritual, Inszenierung und Performanz vom Mittelalter bis zur Neuzeit*, Cologne / Weimar / Vienna 2003, pp. 33–54.

16 Bruno Latour, Morality and Technology. The End of the Means, in: *Theory, Culture & Society* 19 (2002), pp. 247–260, here p. 250.

17 In fact, the boundaries between theater and ritual are not easy to define: »Mittelalterliche Liturgie ist theatralisch, und mittelalterliches Theater ist liturgisch«: Jan-Dirk Müller, Realpräsenz und Repräsentation. Theatrale Frömmigkeit und Geistliches Spiel, in: Hans-Joachim Ziegeler (ed.), *Ritual und Inszenierung. Geistliches und weltliches Drama des Mittelalters und der Frühen Neuzeit,* Tübingen 2004, pp. 113–133, here p. 113; cf. Klaus-Peter Köpping (ed.), *Im Rausch des Rituals. Gestaltung und Transformation der Wirklichkeit in körperlicher Performanz*, Hamburg 2000; Erika Fischer-Lichte, The Medieval Religious Plays – Ritual or Theatre?, in: Elina Gertsman (ed.), *Visualizing Medieval Performance. Perspectives, Histories, Contexts*, Aldershot 2008, pp. 249–261.

18 Arnold van Gennep, *Rites of Passage* [1909], London 1977; Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process. Structure and Anti-Structure*, London 1969; cf. for medieval contexts: Martschukat / Patzold 2003 (note 15); Gertsman 2008 (note 17); Klára Doležalová and Ivan Foletti (eds.), *The Notion of Liminality and the Medieval Sacred Space* (Convivium, Supplementum), Brno 2019.

theatrical event: it, too, can be changed.[19] Therefore, in specific (liminal) contexts of use, objects prove especially significant.[20] When this context is a performance with actors on a stage and with a spectatorship present, such objects are known as props.[21] However, extending this classification to objects – including the hammer – for the medieval and early modern eras must be undertaken very carefully, given that the term ›prop‹ has only been in use since the nineteenth century with regard to theatrical equipment, and what we know today as theater did not exist during the periods in question, instead taking the form of performative acts and paraliturgical stagings.[22]

Two case studies will show the hammer in action: firstly, on a stage, in public rituals such as horse blessings, in which a bishop struck the animals on their heads with a reliquary in the form of a hammer; secondly, during so-called Passion plays, when the players performed the nailing of Christ to the Cross with a hammer. These so-called props – which, in the latter case, were actual tools borrowed from city workshops and transformed into the ›hammer killing the human nature of Christ‹ – open up new perspectives on medieval and early modern objects and their use in general.

Reliquary: The Hammer of Saint Eligius on the Stage of Rituals

When thinking of hammers (and hammers-as-reliquaries) in a medieval Christian context, and certainly of the tools used in the Passion of Christ, the *arma Christi* come to mind. While thousands of wooden particles of the Cross and over thirty nails are venerated as relics all over the world, not a single hammer assumed to have been employed during the Crucifixion exists as an object of veneration today.[23] One possible reason for this omission is that the tool, because it had not come into direct

19 Erika Fischer-Lichte, Ästhetische Erfahrung als Schwellenerfahrung, in: Joachim Küpper and Christoph Menke (eds.), *Dimensionen ästhetischer Erfahrung*, Frankfurt am Main 2003, pp. 138–161, here p. 139.

20 Cf. Ian R. Hodder (ed.), *The Meaning of Things. Material Culture and Symbolic Expression*, New York 1989; Hans Peter Hahn and Hadas Weiss (eds.), *Mobility & Transformations of Things. Shifting Contexts of Material Culture through Time and Space*, Oxford 2013; and within performance studies: Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Performativität. Eine kulturwissenschaftliche Einführung*, Bielefeld 2021, pp. 191–212.

21 Cf. Andrew Sofer, *The Stage Life of Props*, Ann Arbor, MI 2003, p. 50.

22 Cf. ibid.; Kathi Loch, *Dinge auf der Bühne. Entwurf und Anwendung einer Ästhetik der unbelebten Objekte im theatralen Raum*, Aachen 2009; for ›medieval theater‹: Philip Butterworth and Katie Normington (eds.), *Medieval Theatre Performance. Actors, Dancers, Automata and Their Audiences*, Cambridge 2017.

23 For Passion relics, without mention of the hammer: Michael Hesemann, *Die stummen Zeugen von Golgatha. Die faszinierende Geschichte der Passionsreliquien Christi*, Kreuzlingen 2000; Joe Nickell,

contact with the body of Christ, was not considered one of the contact relics and was consequently assigned less importance.[24] The only attestation of an object (now lost) believed to be the hammer from the Crucifixion can be found in connection with the monastery of Laach, today's Benedictine abbey of Maria Laach: in the twelfth century, a Swabian knight named Ulrich presented five relics of Christ's Passion to the abbot Fulbert, in an appeal to join the monastery. The gift included a cup, a knife, a comb, a textile, as well as the hammer. According to Ulrich, he had found them after having a dream in the oratory of Saint Quinctinus in Cologne, a building believed to have been established by the empress Helena (the mother of Constantine the Great), and had stolen them. Even though Frederick I of Schwarzenburg (ca. 1075–1131), Archbishop of Cologne, was opposed to it, he assigned the objects to the monastery of Laach.[25] The abbot Johann Augustin Machhausen (1553–1568) could have seen them in 1562, and he describes the hammer as a »small hatchet.«[26]

There are hammer relics and reliquaries associated with another figure, namely Saint Eligius (589–659/660). Eligius is documented to have worked as a goldsmith as well as an advisor at the Frankish court under King Chlothar II (584–629) and King Dagobert I (603–639) before becoming bishop of Tours and later Noyon, and he is known as the missionary who converted Flanders.[27] These occurrences, along with other episodes from his life and work and, above all, forty-five prestigious objects he himself created – such as tableware, jewelry, a saddle, and a tomb for Saint Martin – are described in a vita written as early as ca. 600.[28] Shortly after his death, his cult as

Relics of Christ, Lexington, KY 2007; Cynthia Hahn, *Passion Relics and the Medieval Imagination*, Oakland, CA 2020.

24 Bosworth / Ziolkowski 2015 (note 9), col. 121.

25 See the legend in: Bertram Resmini, *Das Erzbistum Trier*, vol. 7: *Die Benediktinerabtei Laach* (Germania sacra, N. F. 31), Berlin / New York 1993, pp. 200–201; the assignment: Richard Knipping (ed.), *Die Regesten der Erzbischöfe von Köln im Mittelalter*, vol. 2, Bonn 1901, no. 285, p. 43.

26 Johann Augustin Machhausen, *Rituale monasticae hyparchiae* [...], Maria Laach 1560–1563 (Bonn, University Library, Hs 64, fol. 138), cf. Resmini 1993 (note 25), p. 201.

27 Hans Fehrle, *Die Eligius-Sage*, Frankfurt am Main 1940; Karin von Etzdorff, *Der Heilige Eligius und die Typen seiner Darstellung als Patron der Goldschmiede und Schmiede*, Munich 1956; Hayo Vierck, Werke des Eligius, in: Georg Kossack and Günter Ulbert (eds.), *Studien zur vor- und frühgeschichtlichen Archäologie. Festschrift für Joachim Werner zum 65. Geburtstag*, vol. 2: *Frühmittelalter*, Munich 1974, pp. 309–381; Jean Christophe Masmonteil, *Iconographie et culte de saint Éloi dans l'Occident medieval*, Châtillon-sur-Indre 2012; Rosanna Bianco, Culto e iconografia di sant'Eligio in Puglia tra medioevo ed età moderna, in: *Studi bitontini* 95/98 (2013/2014), pp. 7–26; Richard Marks, SS Eligius and Erasmus: Attribute, Audience and Locus in Late Medieval England, in: Pastoureau / Vassilieva-Codognet 2014 (note 13), pp. 143–156.

28 Bruno Krusch, *Vita Eligii episcopi Noviomagensis* (MGH Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum 4, II), Hannover / Leipzig 1902, pp. 634–761; cf. Clemens M. M. Bayer, Vita Eligii, in: Johannes Hoops et al. (eds.), *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde*, vol. 35, Berlin 2007, pp. 461–524.

the patron of goldsmiths and all metalworking artisans spread rapidly from France and Flanders to Italy and Scandinavia. Certain objects were (and still are) directly attributed to him, namely the communion chalice of Chelles, the jade bowl of Abbot Suger of Saint-Denis (1081–1151), the paten of Charles the Bald, and a cross, as well as some of the spolia in the Egbert shrine in Trier. Even today, the ›Works of Eligius‹ is a topos used to describe early medieval goldsmiths' works, which acquire a special value – comparable to that of a relic – on account of having been produced by a saint.

However, since the fifteenth century, particularly in German- and French-speaking regions, numerous legends about another Eligius, a horseshoer, have been circulating.[29] The various versions essentially report a miracle in which Eligius removed a leg from a horse that had been difficult to tame, shoed the hoof, and then reattached the leg to the animal's body. Significantly, he was believed to have developed a supernatural technique that considerably facilitated his work with the hammer. The late medieval period saw the amalgamation of these two hagiographies of Eligius, such that the two persons became one saint who was both a goldsmith and a horseshoer. What connects them visually – as a kind of hinge – is the attribute of the hammer, with which he either produces golden chalices or hammers hooves, depending on the context of the depiction and the form and scale of the tool.

Another new element in the ritual and cultural history of Eligius can be dated to the fifteenth century, when reliquaries for his relics first came to be created in the form of a hammer.[30] As can be seen on the earliest object, now in Brussels (fig. 4), as well as on twenty-four other examples, the wooden core is mostly covered in finely hammered (!) silver plates. Small glass windows in the sides of the hammer's head reveal the relics inside, and the head itself bears a gilded crown. The artefact in Brussels, notwithstanding its simple form and manufacture, is striking in its valuable materials and, conceptually, in its implication that the saint produced his own reliquary. But the interconnection between the legends of Eligius the goldsmith and Eligius the horseshoer carried over into the use of such objects: the hammer reliquaries were involved in actual performances, which is hardly surprising given their connotations of work, craft, and action. They were used to imitate the manual act of hammering, namely

29 Sabine Griese, Ein neuer Eligius. Die disparate Parallelität von Heiligenvita und Heiligenbild im 15. Jahrhundert, in: Gudrun Litz, Heidrun Munzert, and Roland Liebenberg (eds.), *Frömmigkeit – Theologie – Frömmigkeitstheologie. Contributions to European Church History. Festschrift für Berndt Hamm zum 60. Geburtstag,* Leiden / Boston, MA 2005, pp. 195–210.

30 Carolin Marie Kreuzfeldt, Attribut als Reliquiar – ein neuer Reliquiartypus?, in: Klaus Gereon Beuckers and Dorothee Kemper (eds.), *Typen mittelalterlicher Reliquiare zwischen Innovation und Tradition. Beiträge einer Tagung des Kunsthistorischen Instituts der Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel*, Regensburg 2017, pp. 223–245.

4. Hammer Reliquary of Saint Eligius, 2nd half 15th century, h. 24,5 cm, Brussels, Musées royaux d'art et d'histoire

during the blessing of horses and riders.[31] This is attested for at least fourteen hammer reliquaries.[32] Since the eleventh century, the ritual was practiced on Eligius's day of commemoration, either on June 25 or December 1, and was therefore firmly anchored in the cycle of the liturgical year; still today, it is celebrated in Bavaria, for instance. How exactly to envision this blessing, intended to protect both horse and rider from accidents and illnesses, is clarified by a few enlightening written and pictorial sources. Generally, the blows with the hammer were only feigned, but regardless, they were symbolically efficient.

Naturally, these benedictions cannot be regarded as theatrical acts, since the *celebrans* (the bishop or priest) performs on behalf of and in the presence of Eligius through the hammer and relics. However, precisely in this outward performance of piety – in which an ›actor‹ carries something out with an object in front of an audience – the boundaries blur between religious practice and the mimetic representation[33] of a past action, in a way that defies classification today. What remains important here is the constitutive role of the hammer, effecting the transformation of the horse and rider from ›unprotected‹ to ›protected‹ in the course of the blessing, which could hardly have been accomplished with any other object.[34]

31 Georg Schierghofer, Umrittsbrauch und Roßsegen. Ein Beitrag zur vergleichenden Volkskunde unter besonderer Berücksichtigung Altbayerns, in: *Bayerische Hefte für Volkskunde* 8 (1921), pp. 1–96; Jules Pieters, Bedevaartvaantjes en Paardenommegangen, in: *Ars Folklorica Belgica* 2 (1956), pp. 22–264; and in general for blessings: Christopher Spehr, Segenspraxis und Segenstheologie in der Christentumsgeschichte, in: Martin Leuenberger (ed.), *Segen*, Tübingen 2015, pp. 135–164.

32 Pieters 1956 (note 31), pp. 232–240; cf. Kreuzfeldt 2017 (note 30), pp. 230–231.

33 The term *representatio* could be used for both liturgical and dramatical performances, as emphasized in: Müller 2004 (note 17).

34 For performative practices with reliquaries: Cynthia J. Hahn, Theatricality, Materiality, Relics. Reliquary Forms and the Sensational in Mosan Art, in: Fiona J. Griffiths and Kathryn Starkey (eds.),

Prop: The Hammer in the Passion of Christ on the Stage of Plays

However, one does not need a hammer made of silver, wearing a golden crown and containing relics, to visualize and mediate the outstanding meaning of a specific performance. This could be achieved with any everyday tool, as can be seen in the Passion of Christ. Since the Gospels remain silent on the concrete moment of nailing – only stating briefly, »and they crucified him«[35] – it is not surprising that a distinct pictorial tradition evolved filling this gap. In the thirteenth century, two hundred years after miniatures of the act of crucifixion had first appeared,[36] further motifs developed such as the *arma Christi*, the depiction of the instruments used during the Passion, and the so-called *Living Cross*, a cross with hands holding, among other objects, a hammer.[37] Forming the cultural-historical backdrop to these iconographies was an emerging devotion to the Passion, whose proponents urged people to feel deep compassion for and even to imitate the suffering Christ.[38]

The precise moment of nailing played a prominent role in devotional practice and especially in Passion plays.[39] With various precedents, these plays developed in the context of Passion devotion starting in the fourteenth century. They can be reconstructed today on the basis of a large number of surviving texts, for instance, directing materials with information on stages, actors, and gestures, as well as civic accounts, inventories, permits, stage plans, and even prop lists. It can be concluded that they were theatrical acts and so-called living pictures (*tableaux vivants*) that were

Sensory Reflections. Traces of Experiences in Medieval Artifacts, Berlin 2018, pp. 142–162.

35 Mark 15:20, cf. Luke 23:33, Matthew 27:35, John 19:18.

36 For the earliest depiction of the Crucifixion with the hammering: 1066, London, British Library, Add MS 19352, fol. 23r.

37 Achim Timmermann, The Avenging Crucifix. Some Observations on the Iconography of the Living Cross, in: *Gesta* 40 (2001), pp. 141–160; for *arma Christi*: Lisa H. Cooper and Andrea Denny-Brown (eds.), *The Arma Christi in Medieval and Early Modern Material Culture. With a Critical Edition of »O Vernicle«*, Farnham 2013.

38 Alasdair A. MacDonald, Bernhard Ridderbos, and Rita Schlusemann (eds.), *The Broken Body. Passion Devotion in Late-Medieval Culture*, Groningen 1998.

39 Rainer Warning, *Funktion und Struktur. Die Ambivalenzen des geistlichen Spiels*, Munich 1974; Bernd Neumann, *Geistliches Schauspiel im Zeugnis der Zeit. Zur Aufführung mittelalterlicher religiöser Dramen im deutschen Sprachgebiet*, 2 vols., Munich 1987; Dorothea Freise, *Geistliche Spiele in der Stadt des ausgehenden Mittelalters. Frankfurt – Friedberg – Alsfeld*, Göttingen 2002; Ziegeler 2004 (note 17); Ingrid Kasten and Erika Fischer-Lichte (eds.), *Transformationen des Religiösen. Performativität und Textualität im geistlichen Spiel*, Berlin / New York 2007; Ursula Schulze, *Geistliche Spiele im Mittelalter und in der Frühen Neuzeit. Von der liturgischen Feier zum Schauspiel. Eine Einführung*, Berlin 2012.

performed with reference to the Christian salvation narrative. Even if they did not emerge from the liturgy, they were initially an ecclesiastically controlled event; however, in contrast to the liturgy itself, they merely represented – rather than celebrated – Christian salvation. This was also the case when particular elements of and objects used in the liturgy, rituals, and (preliminary) forms of theater crossed those (today's) classification categories and labels in both directions, as Erika Fischer-Lichte pointed out: »They [the medieval religious plays] oscillated between rituality and theatricality; they were highly ambivalent.«[40] In the Passion plays, the main intention was to visualize the past (in this case, biblical) events in the present, the spectators being invited to engage in *compassio* at different levels. For understanding props and especially the hammer, it is worthwhile to expand on this a little.

A large number of people participated in the staging of the medieval and early modern Passion plays. Most importantly, the event was accompanied by a *proclamator* (also called *precursor*, *regens*, or *rector* and sometimes dressed as one of the Church Fathers) who commented on and explained specific scenes and directed the attention of the audience, which either sat in front of the stage or moved with the players from station to station.[41] The *proclamator* not only sought to ensure a devout attitude of reception but also continuously pointed out that the event was just a play with performers. In the Donaueschingen Passion play dating from the fifteenth century, for instance, it was emphasized that the audience would see a large number of beautiful living pictures performed by people, with the intention of expressing devotion and based upon biblical events:

> »ir werdent ir sehen in menschlicher natur
> gar menig schön andächtig figur
> die vns armen sünder zegůtt
> geschechen sind vom höchsten gůt
> dar vmb das er vns selig macht.«[42]

40 Fischer-Lichte 2008 (note 17), p. 255; cf. Thomas P. Campbell, Liturgy and Drama. Recent Approaches to Medieval Theatre, in: *Theatre Journal* 33 (1981), pp. 289–301; Christoph Petersen, *Ritual und Theater. Meßallegorese, Osterfeier und Osterspiele im Mittelalter*, Tübingen 2004.

41 Glenn Ehrstine, Präsenzverwaltung. Die Regulierung des Spielrahmens durch den Proklamator und andere *expositores ludi*, in: Kasten / Fischer-Lichte 2007 (note 39), pp. 63–79.

42 V. 44–48, cf. Anthonius H. Touber, *Das Donaueschinger Passionsspiel*, Stuttgart 1985, p. 57.

This disclaimer underscoring the fictional status of the characters was thus a significant part of the theatricality of the performance. Within the play, individual protagonists, such as the players in the role of angels, addressed the audience, whether urging it to be silent with the imperative *silete* or inviting participation in communal singing. However, it is not clear how engaged the reception really was, as one source notes that amid the large crowd there were many who could neither see nor hear even half of the event:

> »Quia vbi multitudo ibi confusion
> Sintemal ich weis
> das der hunderste mensch
> nicht die helfft sehen
> geschweig dann hören oder etwas draus behalten kunde.«[43]

The performance was designed as realistically and sophisticatedly as possible, with expensive sets, curtains, and machinery, elaborate costumes,[44] and naturally, props. From the written and pictorial sources, but primarily from deductions from the explained performative act, little can be reconstructed precisely.[45] Even more difficult is the investigation of objects, the props, which may explain why these constitute a remarkably little-studied field.[46] With the exception of the wings once worn by actors in the role of angels in Halberstadt, dated around 1435 – which can be classified as part of the costume and therefore as attributive props[47] – hardly anything that can be

43 Joachim Greff, *Ein Geistliches schönes newes spil / auff das heilige Osterfest gestellet [...]*, Zwickau 1542; cf. Glenn Ehrstine, »Ubi multitudo, ibi confusio«: Wie andächtig war das Spielpublikum des Spätmittelalters?, in: Wernfried Hofmeister and Cora Dietl (eds.), *Das Geistliche Spiel des europäischen Spätmittelalter*s, Wiesbaden 2015, pp. 113–131, here p. 113.

44 Lynette R. Muir, Playing God in Medieval Europe, in: Alan E. Knight (ed.), *The Stage as Mirror. Civic Theatre in Late Medieval Europe*, Cambridge 1997, pp. 25–50; Andrea-Martina Reichel, *Die Kleider der Passion. Für eine Ikonographie des Kostüms*, Online 1998, URL: https://edoc.hu-berlin.de/handle/18452/15091;jsessionid=E940592AC41A171A8159060BC1D4AF2C [last accessed: 21st July 2021].

45 It has already been observed that the preserved texts have been studied more than the performance practice: Klaus Wolf, Für eine neue Form der Kommentierung geistlicher Spiele. Die Frankfurter Spiele als Beispiel der Rekonstruktion von Aufführungswirklichkeit, in: Ziegeler 2004 (note 17), pp. 273–312, here p. 273.

46 One of the few helpful studies: Elisabeth Dutton, Protestant Place, Protestant Props in the Plays of Nicholas Grimald, in: Eva von Contzen and Chanita Goodblatt (eds.), *Enacting the Bible in Medieval and Early Modern Drama*, Manchester 2020, pp. 157–174.

47 Harald Meller, Ingo Mundt, and Boje E. Hans Schmuhl (eds.), *Der Heilige Schatz im Dom zu Halberstadt*, Regensburg 2008, no. 119, pp. 396–397 (Johannes Tripps).

clearly designated as equipment from the plays has survived.[48] A few written sources attest to artefacts that 1) originated from the liturgy but ultimately oscillated between liturgical and theatrical contexts; 2) were made solely for the religious plays; 3) were everyday objects that acquired a different function and meaning in the framework of the play. This first attempt to classify the props of religious plays follows their actual uses as mentioned in the sources.

The first category includes objects noted in very early descriptions of the plays from the tenth century. Even if occasionally liturgical objects have been characterized as (sacred) props,[49] it is appropriate to differentiate between objects produced and used exclusively for the liturgy and those utilized in the plays during their later ›object history.‹ This makes no difference for the objects themselves, but it does for the plays. In the Easter play mentioned in the *Regularis concordia*, for instance, the Marys, having been called back to the tomb by an angel who lifts the curtain, come with censers, pick up a cross, and show it demonstratively.[50] In the Easter play of the so-called *Fleury Playbook*, around twelve hundred palm branches and candelabras are mentioned,[51] and for the Corpus Christi play of 1479 in Künzelsau, a cross reliquary replaced the central scene of the Crucifixion to encourage the *adoratio crucis*.[52] There, it was not the representation of past events nor the invitation to *compassio* that were important but rather the presence of the True Cross. Objects such as this reliquary, hybrids of salvation in Christian Kiening's terms (*Hybriden des Heils*),[53] oscillate in use within communication contexts.

48 Even in the museum of the Oberammergau Passion plays, only a few props have survived, such as the column of the Flagellation (18th c.), an incense burner (19th c.), the »Egyptian chariot« (1910), a palanquin, the throne of Herod (1930), and a cross (1990); cf. Helmut W. Klinner and Michael Henker (eds.), *Die Erlösung spielen. Eine Dokumentation des Oberammergauer Passionsspieles. Führer durch die Dauerausstellung im Passionsspielhaus*, Oberammergau 1993.

49 Cf. Ulla Haastrup, Medieval Props in the Liturgical Drama, in: *Hafnia* 11 (1987), pp. 133–170; Robert Norman Swanson, Medieval Liturgy as Theatre: The Props, in: *Studies in Church History* 28 (1992), pp. 239–253.

50 *Regularis Concordia Anglicae Nationis Monachorum Sanctimonialiumque*, ed. by D. T. Symons, London 1953; Karl Langosch, *Geistliche Spiele. Lateinische Dramen des Mittelalters mit deutschen Versen*, Berlin 1957, pp. 98–105, here p. 100.

51 Dunbar H. Ogden, *The Staging of Drama in the Medieval Church*, Newark, NJ 2002, p. 75.

52 Glenn Ehrstine, The True Cross in Künzelsau: Devotional Relics and the ›Absent‹ Crucifixion Scene of the Künzelsau Corpus Christi Play, in: Cora Dietl, Christoph Schanze, and Glenn Ehrstine (eds.), *Power and Violence in Medieval and Early Modern Theater*, Göttingen 2014, pp. 73–104.

53 Christian Kiening, Hybriden des Heils. Reliquie und Text des Grauen Rocks um 1512, in: Peter Strohschneider (ed.), *Literarische und religiöse Kommunikation in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit*, Berlin 2009, pp. 371–410.

Artefacts are known that belong to the second category, produced intentionally and exclusively for the plays, as in the case of a Roman Passion play (1498) for which two crosses of gilded wood, banners of white silk, a box with the iron nails, a hollow iron lance, and a rope are noted.[54] The *Enventario nuovo* of the Dominican fraternity in Perugia (1339) records, in addition to angel costumes and wings, a cross and a lance; meanwhile, the inventory from Gubbio (1428) lists a wooden dove.[55] Another wooden dove, this one sparkling in appearance, is known from Florence.[56] Also deserving of special attention are the collection records of the dramatic, musical, and ceremonial acts in Coventry between 1392 and 1642, which feature lists drawn from the account books of smiths, carpenters, and dyers, including references to props.[57]

In the case of the Alsfeld Passion play (1501–1517), moreover, sources not only mention the objects but also explain the procedure of their use in order to achieve the most impressive effect. For the Flagellation of Christ, a servant brought a whip already dipped in red paint. When beating the actor with it, red ›welts‹ were left on the body.[58] Likewise, the crown of thorns was equipped with little sponges soaked with red paint. When servants pressed it on the head of the actor playing Christ, paint flowed out of the sponges and ran down the face, creating a very dramatic effect.[59] Also outstanding is the known staging with chairs for the tomb guards,[60] an unusual, ahistorical solution that could only be understood in the context of the performance: the wobbling of the chairs caused by the actors could make visible and audible the earthquake upon the death of Christ.[61]

Finally, the third category of props includes the hammer itself. It can be assumed that in the framework of Passion plays this would have been a tool borrowed from

54 Peter Meredith and John E. Tailby (eds.), *The Staging of Religious Drama in Europe in the Later Middle Ages: Texts and Documents in English Translation*, Kalamazoo, MI 1983, p. 124.

55 Heinz Kindermann, *Das Theaterpublikum des Mittelalters*, Salzburg 1980, p. 206.

56 Alice Villon-Lechner, Sprühende Tauben und flammende Bauten. Das römische Feuerwerk als Friedensfest und Glaubenspropagandatheater, in: ead. and Georg Kohler (eds.), *Die schöne Kunst der Verschwendung. Fest und Feuerwerk in der europäischen Geschichte*, Zurich / Munich 1988, pp. 17–56, here p. 20.

57 Reginald W. Ingram (ed.), *Coventry. Records of Early English Drama*, Manchester 1981.

58 »gaisl vnd Ruettn Jn Rote farb ein gedaucht. hauen im sein Leib der wierdt Pluetig« (863a–b), *Das Admonter Passionsspiel*, ed. by Karl Konrad Polheim, Paderborn 1980, vol. 3, p. 193.

59 »die Cron, Aufs haubt mit ainem Schwämlein in Rote farb Eingedunckht, das im das bluet über das Angesicht Abfleust« (873a–d), ibid.

60 »[...] sëzen sich vmb das grab Auf Stielln vnd hiettn« (1251c–d), ibid.

61 »khumbt ain Erpiden vnd man scheust wie vor, die khriegskhnecht auf den Stielln wanckln« (1251e–f), ibid.

a local smith – and by no means a fake one.[62] The object was thus removed from its everyday purpose (smithing) and became a prop in the context of the play and specifically in its use by the actor during the central scene, the Crucifixion. It is striking that the hammer is mentioned in the texts only implicitly: in the famous *Frankfurter Dirigierrolle* from the fourteenth century, probably the oldest surviving director's book, as well as in the sources on the Passion plays in Donaueschingen and Alsfeld, the scene of nailing is described from the perspective of one of the flagellants:

»Gebet her stumper nagel dry,
hamer vnd zangen auch da by.
an hende vnd an fusz byndet em strenge
vnd recket en nach des cruczes lenge
bys an der locher zeychen,
das beyn vnd fuß dar an reichenn,
die das neyl da dorch dringen.«[63]

The actor explains the action: the protagonist, Christ, was first tied to the Cross while it was resting on the ground, and then the Cross with the body was erected with the help of further ropes. Leaning ladders against it, the tormentors climbed to tighten the ropes that bound the arms and legs of Christ, so that additional pain was caused by pulling apart these members. Then the hands and feet were nailed to the Cross. The excessive violence, which seems especially disturbing today, was further emphasized acoustically in the performance, when – as can be traced to the older versions of the *Frankfurter Dirigierrolle* – the dramatic silence was shattered by loud hammer blows,[64] a description also revealing that real tools were used. Such visual and auditory staging and efficacy clearly outweighed the power of speech. Paradoxically, at just about this central moment of the play, in which the human nature of Christ was believed to have been destroyed, the surviving play texts fall silent.[65]

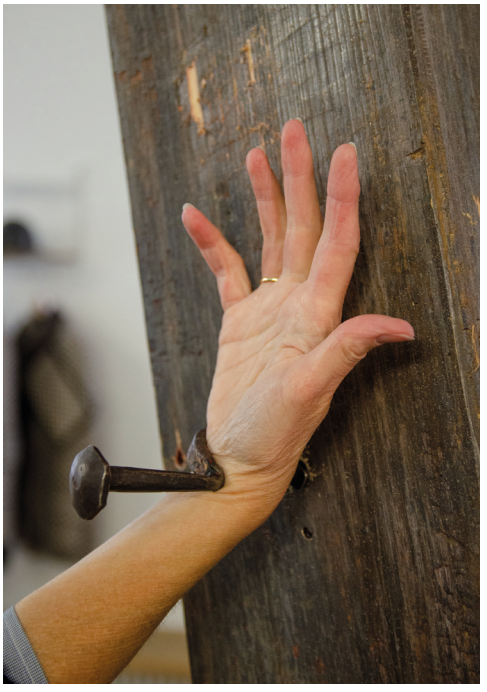
62 As mentioned, for instance, in the smiths' account books, in: Ingram 1981 (note 57), p. 73.

63 *Alsfelder Passionsspiel. Frankfurter Dirigierrolle mit den Paralleltexten, weitere Spielzeugnisse. Alsfelder Passionsspiel mit den Paralleltexten*, ed. by Johannes Janota, Tübingen 2002, V. 5594–5600, p. 657; cf. Donaueschingen: »ich bring dir zang vnd seil / ob mir der büt wurd ouch ein teil / mag ich niena komen dar zů / da mit ich ouch ein zeichen tů / mit minen hammer der ist groß / ich müsß im dennocht geben ein stoß« (V. 3331–3333), Touber 1985 (note 42), p. 221.

64 Klaus Wolf, *Kommentar zur ›Frankfurter Dirigierrolle‹ und zum ›Frankfurter Passionsspiel‹*, Tübingen 2002, p. 211.

65 The methodical problem is explained in: Andreas Kotte, Vom Verstummen der Texte angesichts des Wunders. Wirkungsstrategien im geistlichen Spiel, in: Kasten / Fischer-Lichte 2007 (note 39), pp. 189–200, here p. 199.

As evident in Künzelsau, the Crucifixion was not always performed on stage by actors, but in cases where it was – as in Frankfurt, Donaueschingen, and Alsfeld – one last practical question arises: how was the actor playing Christ actually nailed to the Cross without being killed, while still achieving the dramatic effect of loud nailing? Though the written sources are silent on this problem, it can be assumed that, as with the flagellum and the crown of thorns, an illusionary trick was at work. Such a device can be found by taking a look backstage, so to speak, at the famous Oberammergau Passion plays, which have been performed nearly every ten years since 1634.[66] There, curved nails are employed (fig. 5), a solution imaginable for medieval plays as well.



5. Oberammergauer Passionsspiele »Hinter den Kulissen«

Conclusion: The Hammer as a Liminal Object

From Luther to the Oberammergau Passion plays: based on the perception of the hammer as a simple tool with which, first of all, an act of work is done, in medieval and early modern illuminations and paintings as well as in actual religious and ritual performances, it represents an action, a creative process, the moment of destruction or even killing. The object – in this wide spectrum of associations, in its materiality, and in its direct relation to the body of the acting person – is therefore, from a cultural and anthropological point of view, predestined to mark the transitional stage between a before and an after. Thus, it can be understood as an object emphasizing liminality. The hammer is particularly significant when it is integrated as a reliquary or prop into liminal events and experiences, which include blessings as well as religious

66 *Hört, sehet, weint und liebt. Passionsspiele im alpenländischen Raum*, ed. by Michael Henker, Eberhard Dünninger, and Evamaria Brockhoff, exh.-cat. Oberammergau, Ammergauer Haus, Munich 1990.

plays as a form of theater. It is not so much the actors (celebrans or flagellator) who are supposed to undergo a change through the performance, but rather the audience. Already in Pauwels's painting of Luther with the hammer in his hand, pointing at the Ninety-Five Theses, both the depicted and actual viewers of the scene are meant to perceive and learn about the theses. Meanwhile, in the benedictions, the visualized protection addresses the horse and the rider, and in the Passion plays, the visible and audible nailing to the Cross aims to lead the audience to compassion. From a reception-aesthetic perspective, the significance of the hammers depicted or utilized during these moments is immense. The actual materiality of the object always plays a role, albeit in divergent ways: in the blessings, where a blow on the head is only indicated but not actually executed, the object can be made of the rather soft material of silver, which in its material semantics (material iconology) refers to the goldsmith Eligius and is more appropriate for reliquaries due to its material value. In the case of the religious plays, it is rather an ordinary hammer that performs the action and produces the resulting silence-breaking sound. Hence, far beyond definitional distinctions among tools, reliquaries, and props, the objects create still many possibilities for thinking about their materiality and reception and especially about their use on the ›stages‹ of art, ritual, and theater.

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Joanna Olchawa, The Hammer: Reliquary and Prop as Liminal Objects in Medieval and Early Modern Ritual Performances and Passion Plays, in: Requisiten. Die Inszenierung von Objekten auf der ›Bühne der Kunst‹, hg. von Joanna Olchawa und Julia Saviello, Merzhausen: ad picturam 2023, https://doi.org/10.11588/arthistoricum.1186.c16881