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Healing Touch: Clothed Images of the Virgin in Early Modern Portugal

Abstract

Over the last decades there was a growing interest in religious materiality, miraculous images, votive practices, and how the faithful engaged with devotional art, as well as a renewed impetus to discuss the long-recognized association between sculpture and touch, after the predominance of the visuality approach. Additionally, the neglected phenomenon of clothing statues has also been increasingly explored. Based on the reading of *Santuário Mariano* (1707–1723), written by Friar Agostinho de Santa Maria (1642–1728), this paper will closely examine those topics. Besides producing a monumental catalogue of Marian shrines and pilgrimage sites, this source offers a unique insight into the religious experience and the reciprocal relationship between image and devotee in Early Modern Portugal, and is a particularly rich source when describing the believers' pursuit of physical contact with sculptures. This yearning for proximity is partly explained by the belief in the healing power of Marian sculptures, which in turn seemed to be conveniently transferred to a myriad of objects. When contact with the images themselves was not possible, devotees sought out their clothes, crowns, rosary beads, metric relics, and so forth. Items of clothing such as mantles and veils were particularly used and so it seems obvious they were not mere adornments or donations, but also mediums and extensions of the sculptures' presence and power. By focusing on the thaumaturgic role of the statues' clothes and jewels, I will argue how the practice of dressing sculptures was due to much more than stylistic desires or processional needs and draw attention to the many ways believers engaged with religious art in Early Modern Portugal.

Keywords: Marian devotion, miraculous images, clothed sculptures, holy matter, *ex-votos*

Introduction

In 1991, Richard Trexler deemed the practice of clothing sculptures as one of the most neglected subjects in Art History.¹ Even though it remains significantly vital in the Catholic world, this late medieval tradition has never been fully accepted by the Church. In fact, the prescriptions issued from Trent's Council and the consecutive synodal constitutions tried unsuccessfully to regulate and weaken the custom from the 16th century onward, most often in response to the use of profane attire that failed to respect the saints' lives and decorum.² Usually considered a feature of "excessive devotion", this practice was the subject of derogatory remarks by 19th and 20th-century intellectuals which prevailed until recently.³ In 1950, for instance, art historian Elizabeth Weismann claimed in her work about Mexican art, that the dressed images represented "the death of sculpture".⁴ It was not until the 1990s that systematic studies on this issue first emerged mainly through anthropologists such as Antonio Cea Gutiérrez,⁵ Riccarda Pagnozzato,⁶ and Marlène Albert-Llorca,⁷ to name a few.

In Portugal, the custom of clothing sculptures seems to have slowly spread from the 15th century onwards. For instance, a mid-15th-century inventory of Guimarães' Collegiate of *Nossa Senhora da Oliveira*, reveals the sculpture of Our Lady (Figs. 1, 2) was adorned with veils and mantles,⁸ and around 1488, when Brites de Noronha (daughter of the II Count of Abrantes, D. João de Almeida) professed in Aveiro's Convent of Jesus, she offered a dress and a coif to Our Lady.⁹ In 1508, the inventory from the Order of Christ's visitation to the church of *Nossa Senhora da Conceição* in

1 R. Trexler, "Habiller et Déshabiller les Images: Esquisse d'une Analyse", in: *L'Image et la production du sacré: actes du colloque de Strasbourg, 20-21 janvier 1988*, eds. F. Dunand, J. Spieser, J. Wirth, Paris, 1991, p. 195.

2 C. Saravia, "Repercusion en España del Decreto del Concilio de Trento sobre las Imágenes", *Boletín del Seminario de Estudios de Arte y Arqueología*, 1960, XXVI, pp. 129-143; P. Martínez-Burgos García, "Las constituciones sinodales y la imagen procesional. Normas para la fiesta del siglo XVI", *Espacio, Tiempo y Forma*, 1989, s. VII, no. 2, pp. 81-92; "La imagen de vestir: el origen de una devoción barroca", in: Pedro de Mena y su Época, ed. J. M. Morales Folguera, Sevilla, 1990, pp. 149-159; M. Rocha, "Dirigismo na produção da imaginária religiosa nos séculos XVI-XVIII: as Constituições Sinodais, *MVSEV*, 1996, s. IV, 5, pp. 187-202; A. R. G. de Ceballos, "Image and Counter-Reformation in Spain and Spanish America", in: *Sacred Spain. Art and Belief in the Spanish World*, ed. R. Kasl, New Haven, London, 2009, pp. 15-35.

3 J. Fuentes y Ponte, *Memoria sobre Indumentaria de las Imágenes de la Santísima Virgen en las Diferentes Épocas de la Historia*, Lérida, 1893; F. Solá I Moreta, *Las Imágenes Marianas de talla y los vestidos postizos*, Lérida, 1917.

4 E. W. Weismann, *Mexico in Sculpture, 1521-1821*, Cambridge MA, 1950, p. 178.

5 A. Cea Gutiérrez, *Religiosidad popular, imágenes vestideras*, Zamora, 1992.

6 R. Pagnozzato, *Madonne della Laguna. Simulacri 'da vestire' dei secoli XIV-XIX*, Rome, 1993.

7 M. Albert-Llorca, *Les Vierges Miraculeuses. Légendes et Rituels*, Paris, 2002.

8 E. Almeida, "Os Cónegos da Oliveira: Tesouro da Colegiada", *Revista de Guimarães*, 1926, no. 34, 4, pp. 164-173.

9 D. M. G. Santos, *O Mosteiro de Jesus de Aveiro*, vol. II/2, Lisbon, 1967, p. 496.



Fig. 1. *Santa Maria de Guimarães* or *Nossa Senhora da Oliveira*, att. 13th century, wooden sculpture, Museu de Alberto Sampaio, Guimarães. Photo by Diana Pereira



Fig. 2. “De N. S. da Oliveira de Guimarães, o Retrato Verdadeiro Anno 1649” [True portrait of *Nossa Senhora da Oliveira* from Guimarães], att. José de Avelar Rebelo, oil on canvas, Irmandade de *Nossa Senhora da Quietação*, Lisbon. Photo by Diana Pereira

Lisbon, revealed the image had four frocks, two gowns, eight shirts, and a vestment to clothe the Infant Jesus.¹⁰ In 1510, *Nossa Senhora de Tróia* had three bliauts, two frocks, one of which was already old, two robes, eight wimples, and three hoods and a vestment for the Infant Jesus.¹¹ At Alcobaça’s Cistercian Monastery, the inventory from that same year included five gowns belonging to Our Lady, three of which were

10 P. Dias, *Visitações da Ordem de Cristo de 1507 a 1510. Aspectos artísticos*, Coimbra, 1979, p. 71–78.

11 V. P. Santos, R. Lino, L. Silveira, *Documentos para a História da Arte em Portugal, 7 – Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo: Visitações de Alvalade, Casével, Aljustrel e Setúbal (Ordem de São Tiago)*, Lisbon, 1969, p. 107–114.

already old, a bodice, ten old wimples, three veils, four robes, and a cap for the Infant Jesus, besides a few caps belonging to Saint Bernard, Saint Benedict, and an angel.¹²

The importance of this practice, as well as of Marian devotion, in Early Modern Portugal, is confirmed through the ten volumes of *Santuário Mariano, e Historia das Imagens milagrosas de Nossa Senhora, e das milagrosamente apparecidas* (Marian Sanctuary, and history of the miraculous Images of Our Lady, and of the miraculously appeared), written by the Augustinian Friar Agostinho de Santa Maria (1642–1728), published between 1707 and 1723, and my primary source for this paper. As the title suggests, it concerned only the miracle-working images of the Virgin Mary existing in Portugal and the former overseas territories under its influence, which comprised Angola, Brazil, Ceuta, China, Gulf of Guinea, India, Indonesia, Iran, Japan, Malaysia, Morocco, Mozambique, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, and Zimbabwe. The author also included the Canary Islands and the Philippines, at the time under the Spanish Crown. Following the global enterprise of Wilhelm Gumpfenberg's *Atlas Marianus* (1672), *Santuário Mariano* describes almost two thousand images of Our Lady, belonging to urban and rural shrines, parish churches, cathedrals, convents, monasteries, and even a few private chapels.

Driven by an intense devotion towards Our Lady, the author states his goal was to compile the histories and origins of her miraculous images in order to thank for the favors she had granted him and help increase her cult,¹³ which meant the correct veneration of her representations, whose utility he clearly defended. He states it was “a known thing”, that their use heightened devotion and, because they represented God and Our Lady who granted many benefits through them, the faithful should thus dutifully employ themselves to their cult.¹⁴ In the beginning of his second volume, however, Fr. Agostinho interestingly says that, although Our Lady's images are inanimate, they “have life to distribute favors”.¹⁵

It is not my ambition to thoroughly discuss if or how devotees understood images as being inhabited by divine presence or generating power themselves.¹⁶ My aim with this paper is merely to explore how believers relied on a myriad of objects

12 S. A. Gomes, *Visitações a Mosteiros Cistercienses em Portugal. Séculos XV e XVI*, Lisbon, 1998, p. 69–70. Inventories from this time reveal it was also common to clothe sculptures of other religious figures, but there seems to be a bigger predominance regarding images of Our Lady and the Infant Jesus. On the theme of clothed Baby Jesus see C. Klapisch-Zuber, *Women, Family and Ritual in Renaissance Italy*, Chicago, London, 1985, pp. 310–329.

13 A. S. Maria, *Santuário Mariano*, Lisbon, 1707a, pp. IIII–IIIIv.

14 A. S. Maria, *Santuário Mariano*, Lisbon, 1720, pp. 2–4.

15 A. S. Maria, *Santuário Mariano*, Lisbon, 1707b, pp. 1–3.

16 On discussions about this matter see, by way of example, R. Trexler, “Florentine Religious Experience: the Sacred Image”, *Studies in the Renaissance*, 1972, 19, pp. 7–41; D. Freedberg, *The Power of Images. Studies in the History and Theory of Response*, Chicago, London, 1989; H. Belting, *Likeness and Presence: History of the Image Before the Era of Art*, Chicago, London, 1996; A. Gell, *Art and Agency. An Anthropological Theory*, Oxford, 1998; W. A. Christian, Jr., “Images as Beings in Early Modern Spain”, in: *Sacred Spain. Art and Belief in the Spanish World*, ed. R. Kasl, New Haven, London, 2009, pp. 75–99; C. van Eck, *Art, Agency and the Living Presence. From the Animated Image to the Excessive Object*, Boston, Berlin, Munich, 2015; for an in-depth analysis of the theological

and practices that connected them to the sacred on their daily lives, and through which they experienced and manifested their belief. As David Morgan stated, forms of materiality, comprising sensations, things, spaces, performances, emotions and memories, mediate, enable, and enact belief,¹⁷ and ritual, as Richard Trexler so eloquently put it, “is at the base of religion, after all”.¹⁸ It is through ritual that the power and presence of statues is confirmed.¹⁹

In this context, *Santuario Mariano* is especially rich for its many accounts of devotional practices and the reciprocal relationship between images and believers, and is of key importance for the study of clothed saints as it differentiates whether a sculpture was dressed with textiles or not. The clothing took various forms. The majority of dressed sculptures only had perfectly carved heads and hands, being completed with a pyramidal “roca” structure instead of legs, meaning they were fully clothed (Fig. 3). These were common in Portugal at least since the 16th century. There are also numerous references to images “*de vestidos*”, meaning they had also been deliberately created to be fully dressed, probably had articulated limbs, but did not have a “roca” structure (Fig. 4). Additionally, there were statues which, although not initially meant to be dressed, were either fully clothed or only partially adorned with a mantle or a wimple. In fact, many were even mutilated to better accommodate clothing (Figs. 1, 8).²⁰

In order to debate the incomplete notion that the practice of dressing statues resulted from mere aesthetic desires, stylistic renewals, processional and liturgical needs or to make them more lifelike,²¹ I will argue how clothes acted not only as

discussion happening in the late Middle Ages see C. W. Bynum, *Christian Materiality. An essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe*, New York, 2015.

17 D. Morgan, “Introduction. The matter of belief”, in: *Religion and Material Culture. The Matter of Belief*, ed. D. Morgan, London, New York, 2010, pp. 8–12.

18 R. Trexler, *Public Life in Renaissance Florence*, New York, London, 1980, p. xviii.

19 J. P. Mitchell, “Performing statues”, in: *Religion and Material Culture...*, p. 266.

20 D. Pereira, “«Un extravío de la piedad»: consecuencias e leituras da prática de vestir a Virgem em Portugal e Espanha”, in: *Dinâmicas do Património Artístico. Circulação, Transformações e Diálogos*, eds. C. M. Soares, V. Mariz, Lisbon, pp. 145–151.

21 For instance, in 1950 Elizabeth Weismann justified the survival of the custom of clothing saints with the possibility of adapting them to the liturgical calendar: “But there was something very appealing about a saint with a rich wardrobe. In Lent the Virgin must wear mourning; satin, tinsel, and jewels were hardly enough to bedeck her for Easter or Christmas; but immediately after the Nativity, when at Holy Innocents she must flee with the Child into Egypt, she must be equipped with traveling cape, pilgrim’s hat, lunch basket, and water gourd”. Later, regarding the changes imposed on the image of Our Lady of Health in Pátzcuaro, which “had been made according to the antique manner and usage”, the author states that it was also a matter of taste. E. W. Weismann, op. cit., p. 178. Susan Webster explains the popularized production of lifelike “roca”, “candelerero” or articulated sculptures in 16th century Spain, with their reduced cost and weight and their versatility and “affective or experiential advantages” since their actual garments and movement contributed to a more effective persuasiveness. Regarding the 13th-century *Virgen de los Reyes* from the Cathedral of Seville, the author equally implies the medieval statues were clothed “to accommodate changing tastes”, S. V. Webster, “Shameless Beauty and worldly splendor on the Spanish Practice of Adorning the Virgin”, in: *The Miraculous Image in*



Fig. 3. *Nossa Senhora da Conceição*, 17th century (c), “roca” image with articulated arms, Museu de Aveiro. Photo by Diana Pereira



Fig. 4. Unidentified saints, 18th century, articulated sculptures, Museu Nacional Frei Manuel do Cenário, Évora. Photo by DRCA

embellishments, but also as testimonies of the images’ miraculous power since they were often offered as *ex-votos*. As Luke Syson noted, while sometimes the practice of dressing sculpted figures “was simply intended to increase a sculpture’s credibility; unlike carved draperies, textiles move freely with the breeze”, on other occasions the rich clothes were “understood as ostentatious signals of the honor and reverence” rendered to the holy figure.²²

Most importantly, I will argue that clothes were also agents of the images’ prodigious miracles, as well as extensions of their powerful presence. While focusing on

the Late Middle Ages and Renaissance, eds. E. Thunø, G. Wolf, Rome, 2004, pp. 254, 265. Finally, Luísa Alcalá states the following: “Typically, images were altered for two main reasons: in preparation for taking them out of their churches for processions and in order to dress them in luxurious clothes donated by devout followers, especially women. The alterations in both cases were meant to make the images more lifelike, more efficient instruments of devotion”. L. E. Alcalá, “The Image and Its Maker. The Problem of Authorship in Relation to Miraculous Images in Spanish America”, in: *Sacred Spain. Art and Belief in the Spanish World*, ed. R. Kasl, New Haven, London, 2009, p. 59.

²² L. Syson, “Polychrome and its Discontents: a History”, in: *Like Life: Sculpture, Color, and the Body*, eds. L. Syson et al., New Haven, London, 2018, p. 24.

the role clothes and jewelry had in healing the sick and dying devotees, I will approach this subject through the believers' constant search for bodily contact with the divine.

Embellishments and enablers

As Garnett and Rosser recognized, once rich clothing or jewelry were attached to an image, they assured the object's potency, as they were usually offered as *ex-votos*.²³

Many of the images described in *Santuário Mariano*, as I mentioned above, were sculptures that, despite not requiring any clothing, were fully or partially dressed. Friar Agostinho gives a number of reasons for this phenomenon. Besides occasional references to images dressed to hide damage or deterioration – in some cases mutilations caused by devotees to ease their weight in processions, as it happened with Mourão's *Nossa Senhora das Candeias*²⁴ and Monsaraz's *Nossa Senhora da Orada*²⁵ – many of his descriptions concern sculptures adorned with clothes due to the faithful's desire to show devotion and reverence. Regarding Guarda's *Nossa Senhora dos Remédios*, "barely visible beneath the rich dress", he said the statue was clothed by devotees for greater veneration and respect.²⁶ Covilhã's *Nossa Senhora do Fastio* was dressed in order to "increase reverence and devotion towards her".²⁷ In rarer situations the faithful were not satisfied with the sculptures' appearance as, according to the author, seemed to be the case of *Nossa Senhora do Azinhozo* (Mogadouro, Bragança).²⁸

Finally, the author gives several examples of images that were dressed with offerings to either thank for the received graces or attempt to compel the Virgin into answering petitions.

São Sebastião da Pedreira's *Senhora da Saúde*, for instance, was frequently promised a dress in exchange for help in some distress.²⁹ Many of *Nossa Senhora do Parto*'s robes were given by women whom she had helped in dangerous child-births.³⁰ Although the image of Ribatejo's *Nossa Senhora da Atalaia* was perfectly sculpted, the author says "it was necessary to dress her in order to signal the exchanges provided by the many great miracles which the Lord had worked through her" (Fig. 5).³¹ In 1512, *Senhora da Atalaia* owned already fourteen gowns as well as shirts and wimples. In a curious resolution, that year's visitation ordered that the silver bourse that had belonged to Leonor of Portugal (1434–1467), Empress of

23 J. Garnett, G. Rosser, *Spectacular Miracles. Transforming Images in Italy from the Renaissance to the Present*, London, 2013, p. 126.

24 A. S. Maria, *Santuário Mariano*, Lisbon, 1718, p. 237.

25 Ibid., p. 230.

26 A. S. Maria, *Santuário Mariano*, Lisbon, 1711, pp. 35–40.

27 Ibid., pp. 117–118.

28 A. S. Maria, *Santuário Mariano*, Lisbon, 1716, pp. 638–642.

29 A. S. Maria, *Santuário Mariano*, 1707a, pp. 447–448.

30 Ibid., pp. 346–347.

31 Ibid., 1707b, pp. 407–411.



Fig. 5. “N. S.ª da Atalaia”, 1725–1890 (±), engraving, R.S. 2076, Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal, Lisbon

the Holy-Roman Empire, and was offered to Our Lady by Lady Catarina Lopes, should be kept and displayed in the image especially during the main festivities.³²

All of these descriptions strengthen Thomas Golsenne’s theory that the adornments are what truly enables the belief in miraculous images. Golsenne suggests that the establishment of worship towards a miracle-working image is oriented by two main poles: firstly, by the build-up of the hagiographic collections containing all miracle testimonies and authentication procedures – in his words the miracle needs to be authenticated and repeated in order to exist – and secondly, by the votive cult that includes all material aspects of worship and tangible proofs of the effectiveness of the image.³³

According to Golsenne, when the devotee enters a shrine to venerate an image, he already believes in its powers because he heard the miracle reports. But it is what he sees that reinforces his beliefs: meaning, the staging of the image, and the entire decorative device that surrounds and enhances it, including the *ex-votos* by the altar. Meghan Holmes attributes the same role to *ex-votos*, recognizing these were “critical signs of the initial activation and the continued efficacy

32 M. B. Dias, *Visitações e Provimentos da Ordem de Sant’Iago em Aldeia Galega de Ribatejo, Volume I 1486–1537*, Montijo, 2005, pp. 51–52.

33 T. Golsenne, “Parure et Culte”, in: *La Performance des Images*, eds. A. Dierkens, G. Bartholeyns, T. Golsenne, Brussels, 2010, pp. 80–81.

of a miraculous image” and consequently “more attention was given to their visibility and legibility within sanctuary display”.³⁴ In fact, she notes how unwitting and unapproved miracles were mainly documented through their exhibition.

Influenced by Freedberg, Belting and Gell’s contributions,³⁵ and based on Jean-Claude Schmitt’s conception of the reliquary as the institutional and visual proof of the relic’s authenticity,³⁶ Golsenne concludes that, without adornments, the image is merely a representation. In his view, the ornamentation does not make the miracle, but it enables the belief that a miracle was accomplished through that image.³⁷

Richard Trexler had already hinted at this when he explained that Florentines sensed “there were certain forms that, if incorporated into images, were known to have particularly fruitful impacts upon the attitudes of devotees”. So, in 1397, a group of citizens discussed with the *opera* of Florence’s cathedral on how to adorn and where to place a painting of the Virgin, deciding to move it, retouch it, and surround the new altar with scepters, in order to increase its impact upon the viewers and sustain its devotion.³⁸ As Ronda Kasl put it, the image was transformed into “an instrument of religious propaganda” whose meaning and power depended on its “extrinsic elaboration and embellishment.”³⁹ Additionally, concerning how objects acquire value, Daniel Miller identified the “framing mechanisms” as central to the animation of the statue, through which it is set aside as special.⁴⁰ Finally, more recently Garnett and Rosser equally noted how ornamentation, specifically clothes and jewels, not only attested, but activated the images’ power:

To embellish a sacred image with jewelry or clothing has since ancient and medieval times been understood as an act of supernatural empowerment. Cases are recorded in which the image, as soon as it is finely dressed, begins to work miracles: ornamentation in such instances is not the acknowledgement but the catalyst of the supernatural presence.⁴¹

34 M. Holmes, *The Miraculous Image in Renaissance Florence*, New Haven, London, 2013, p. 51.

35 D. Freedberg, op. cit.; H. Belting, op. cit., A. Gell, op. cit.

36 J. C. Schmitt, *Le Corps des Images. Essais sur la culture visuelle au Moyen Âge*, Paris, 2002, p. 284. On this subject see C. Hahn, “What do Reliquaries do for Relics?”, *Numen*, 2010, vol. 57, no. 3/4, pp. 284–316.

37 T. Golsenne, op. cit., pp. 81–83.

38 R. Trexler, *Public life...*, pp. 113–114.

39 R. Kasl, “Delightful Adornments and Pious Recreation”, in: *Sacred Spain. Art and Belief in the Spanish World*, ed. R. Kasl, New Haven, London, 2009, p. 149.

40 D. Miller, *Material Culture and Mass Consumption*, Oxford, 1987, cited in J. P. Mitchell, op. cit., p. 268.

41 J. Garnett, G. Rosser, op. cit., p. 125. Marina Warner reached a similar conclusion: “Adornment is central and a prime way of glorifying and consecrating; ingenious and lavish accretions magnify the object of the decoration – a person, a statue, or an icon – enhancing the power of its presence and infusing it with magical efficacy. The difference between a painting of the Madonna by Fra Angelico or Leonardo, and a miraculous icon of the Virgin, such as her cult statues in Seville and Guadalupe, lies in the layers of ornament the statues have accrued. [...] The need to adorn stretches beyond the sacred icon to the chapel where it stands: the greater the sunbursts of gold, silver, jewels, and flowers around these images, the greater their thau-

Significantly, in Ovid's Myth of Pygmalion, the statue comes alive under the artist's insistent touch, but an important step towards the climax of divinely granted graces was its adornment with clothes and jewels.⁴² Identified by Stoichita as an "animation strategy", the clothing was, also in his words, a "warming" strategy, since the fabrics provided color and warmth to the cold and pale sculpture.⁴³ Furthermore, they provided a second texture, defining intimacy and conveying identity.⁴⁴

Besides being important contributors to testify, authenticate or even activate the power of holy images, clothes and other adornments, as we will see, shared, multiplied and conveyed that same power when the direct contact with the primary object was not possible.

Searching for contact

It is worth noting that the majority of the miraculous images described in *Santuário Mariano* were sculptures. In fact, of the almost two thousand cases catalogued, less than a hundred were paintings. The author himself provides his interpretation of that predominance. When referring to Borba's miraculous painting of *Nossa Senhora do Soveral*, he says the church priest commissioned a sculpture of the same title, because the "ignorant" people were more easily moved by three dimensional images than with paintings.⁴⁵

The appeal probably resides in the fact that, as Hagi Kenaan summed up, sculpture explores the hope of "finding life in formed matter", carrying the possibility that it will come alive in our reality,⁴⁶ because while "our bodies can never actually inhabit a pictorial space", they share the same world with the sculpted figures.⁴⁷

When reading *Santuário Mariano*'s texts one cannot help thinking its contemporaries were probably unsurprised with statues coming alive either by bleeding, crying, sweating, moving, and even returning to the place they had miraculously appeared on. Just as Pygmalion vivified his statue through touch and Venus' divine intervention,⁴⁸ the images described by Friar Agostinho often showed living

maturgic powers". M. Warner, "No Dead Matter", in: *Like Life. Sculpture, Color, and the Body*, ed. L. Syson et al., New Haven, London, 2018, pp. 51–52.

42 "He decks her limbs with robes and on her fingers/ Sets splendid rings, a necklace round her neck,/ Pearls in her ears, a pendant on her breast". Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. A. D. Melville, Oxford, 2008, pp. 232–234.

43 V. Stoichita, *O Efeito Pigmalião: Para uma Antropologia Histórica dos Simulacros* (The Pygmalion Effect. From Ovid to Hitchcock), Lisbon, 2011, pp. 51–57.

44 On the identity conferred by clothes to statues see D. Freedberg, op. cit., pp. 113–119 and R. Trexler, "Habiller"...

45 A. S. Maria, *Santuário Mariano*, op. cit., 1718, pp. 161–165.

46 H. Kenaan, "Touching Sculpture", in: *Sculpture and Touch*, ed. P. Dent, Surrey, 2014, p. 54.

47 Ibid., p. 53.

48 M. Paraskos, "Bringing into being: vivifying sculpture through touch", in: *Sculpture and Touch*, ed. P. Dent, Surrey, 2014, p. 64. On the basilar predominance of the tactile over the visual in the Myth of Pygmalion see the in-depth study by V. Stoichita, op. cit.

attributes in response to people's actions of either veneration or offence and, most significantly, because of their miraculous identity,⁴⁹ an issue I will return to below.

Santuário Mariano repeatedly portrays the believers' relentless search for some kind of physical proximity with images of the Virgin. While touch is an undeniable part of the beholder's interaction with sculptures, the quest persistently described in this source was obviously cemented by the belief in their healing properties, which in many cases were the only solution after the use of various hopeless remedies. For example, in the former Convent of St. Clare in Caminha (Viana do Castelo), nuns usually resorted to an image of *Nossa Senhora da Conceição*. Friar Agostinho tells how Mariana de Santo António suffered a deathly fever and a suffocating nose and mouth bleeding that did not stop with the various remedies, relics and stones that were applied to her. On the verge of losing her senses, she asked for *Nossa Senhora da Conceição* and when the sculpture was brought to her, the nun embraced it, promising inwardly to serve Our Lady. Both acts, the gesture and the vow, immediately stopped the bleeding and diminished the fever.⁵⁰

Jean-Marie Sansterre noted that stories such as these were repeated since the late Middle Ages. For instance, song 256 from the 13th-century *Cantigas de Santa Maria*, traditionally attributed to Alfonso X the Wise (1221–1284), tells how Queen Beatrice of Swabia (1205–1235) survived a high fever after kissing the hands and feet of a statue of the Virgin that had been brought to her.⁵¹

This kind of direct contact, however, was often restricted, and the mere visual access frequently regulated since the images were generally inaccessible in high niches, encased in glass, concealed with curtains or behind grids. According to Meghan Holmes, these were distancing mechanisms implemented to restrain the familiarity with the figures, contributing "to the yearning for the image".⁵² Fr. Agostinho de Santa Maria recurrently describes such apparatus, pointing to the draperies, window panes and grids that were favourable to greater decency in presenting the miraculous objects. *Nossa Senhora dos Remédios* from the former Convent of Salvador

49 The animation of images, relics, and hosts was often a response to the need to renovate their forgotten or neglected cults, and to iconoclastic or heretic attacks and offences by Muslims, the Jewish, or misbehaving Christians, see R. Trexler, "Florentine"..., pp. 19–28; D. Freedberg, op. cit. pp. 283–316; C. W. Bynum, "The Blood of Christ in the Later Middle Ages", *Church History*, 2002, vol. 71, no. 4, pp. 685–714; C. W. Bynum, *Christian Materiality*..., pp. 22, 34–35, 108, 256–25. Bynum argues the changeability of the objects showed their transcendancy as "locus of a God revealed": by bleeding or weeping, they disclosed a power that lies beyond, revealing God through matter; W. A. Christian, Jr., "Images as Beings"..., on the images' "will" to be venerated in a specific place see *Religiosidad local en la España de Felipe II* (Local Religion in Sixteenth Century Spain), Madrid, 1991, pp. 98–104. Furthermore, in some cases, the sculptures' articulated limbs could imitate autonomous movement, see C. Swift, "Robot Saints", *Preternature: Critical and Historical Studies on the Preternatural*, 2015, vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 52–77.

50 A. S. Maria, *Santuário Mariano*, Lisbon, 1712, pp. 181–186.

51 Cited in J. Sansterre, "Sacralité et pouvoir thaumaturgique des statues mariales (Xe siècle–première moitié du XIIIe siècle)", *Revue Mabillon*, 2011, t. 22, p. 75.

52 M. Holmes, op. cit., p. 207.

(Lisbon) was closed in a windowed niche which was only opened for celebrations or to answer special requests,⁵³ the curtain covering *Nossa Senhora do Rosário* from the Convent of St. Mónica (Lisbon) was only removed on holy days and Sundays,⁵⁴ and some images such as Vila Viçosa's *Nossa Senhora da Conceição*, were guarded by silver grids (Fig. 6). Note how the Royal Brotherhood of *Nossa Senhora da Conceição*, seeking the protection of its Treasurer's privileges, stated in a 1794 letter to Vila Viçosa's bailiff that the former was the sole possessor of the key to the niche of Our Lady and that only he could open it on celebrations or to allow the Royal family to kiss the image.⁵⁵



Fig. 6. The closed silver grids on the main altar of the Sanctuary of Nossa Senhora da Conceição, Vila Viçosa, 1950s (?), Coleção Passaporte “Loty”

This 15th century limestone statue was, in fact, surrounded by various distancing mechanisms as, besides the silver grids, it was fully clothed at least since the early 17th century (Fig. 7, 8).⁵⁶ In 1679, the trousseau of *Nossa Senhora da Conceição* comprised ten robes and seven mantles, including, by way of example, a blue

53 A. S. Maria, *Santuário Mariano*, op. cit. 1707a, pp. 44–50.

54 Ibid., pp. 340–342.

55 Arquivo Histórico da Casa de Bragança, NG. 731, fl. 5.

56 Holmes also considers the “ceremonial dressing-up” of images as a distancing mechanism. M. Holmes, op. cit., p. 207; F. Pardal, *Uma Devoção de Grandes e Pequenos: Nossa Senhora da Conceição de Vila Viçosa nos séculos XVII e XVIII*, Master Thesis, FLUL, Lisbon, 2018, p. 48.



Fig. 7. Nossa Senhora da Conceição fully clothed with 18th-century garments, Sanctuary of Nossa Senhora da Conceição, Vila Viçosa. Photo by Diana Pereira



Fig. 8. Nossa Senhora da Conceição without textile clothes, att. 15th century, limestone polychrome sculpture, Sanctuary of Nossa Senhora da Conceição, Vila Viçosa. Photo by DGPC/LJF

camlet⁵⁷ dress with Milan gold trimmings and lined with yellow taffeta, another made of golden and white camlet decorated with golden lace, and a golden and crimson one, lined with blue taffeta and decorated with nine golden galloons.⁵⁸

Beyond the sumptuous appearance, this meant the exact form and material in which the image was sculpted were known only to the people who clothed it until the 20th century. In the early 18th century, it was wrapped in a “shirt made of a white cloth” that was never removed and over which it was dressed “with rich clothes of precious fabrics, and mantles according to the festivities”. At the time, “the person who used to dress the sculpture stated that it had never been possible for him or her to take away the cloth and learn its substance; but it seemed to be

57 Camlet or chamlet (in Portuguese “chamalote”): a woven fabric thought to have been initially made with camel hair (and often of Angora goat hair in the 16th and 17th centuries) and later with mixtures of wool and silk. It could also incorporate metal thread. It was associated with rich fabrics of Eastern provenance, see *The Lexis of Cloth and Clothing Project*, The University of Manchester, 2018 <<http://lexisearch.arts.manchester.ac.uk/entry.aspx?id=768>> [accessed 15 January 2020]; V. Cumming, C. W. Cunnington, P. E. Cunnington, *The Dictionary of Fashion History*, London, 2017, p. 237.

58 F. Pardal, op. cit., pp. 312–314.

made of stone.”⁵⁹ Nobody dared to examine the object. Fr. Agostinho explains this fear resulted from a tragic episode that had happened many years before him. According to an account by a Treasurer serving in the shrine, a Bishop from Elvas had wanted to know if Our Lady was indeed made of stone, as it was said, and so he pricked the statue with a pin. Blood immediately came pouring and so the experience was never repeated.⁶⁰ We may consider that legends such as this equally worked as distancing mechanisms.

Even today, the cloth is not removed and the layers of undergarments (white chemises and underskirts) are rarely changed, meaning only a few people ever saw the sculpture’s true appearance in person.

Discussing the application of textile curtains covering miniatures of an early 15th century Book of Hours made in Bruges, Kathryn Rudy suggests that “having to lift the curtain before contemplating the image would have added a layer of physicality and ritual to the process of reading and looking”, engaging the reader in a “specific haptic relationship with the manuscript”.⁶¹ On the other hand, discussing the practice of wrapping relics with precious fabrics, Martina Bagnoli explains that “as with all sacred things, relics were not to be touched by human hands”, so they should be shielded in due veneration. Furthermore, Bagnoli argues that the protective cloths “proclaimed the intangible nature of the divine”.⁶²

The secrecy surrounding statues such as the one from Vila Viçosa and their ritual re-dressings, is often explained with the necessity to protect and respect the Virgin’s “nakedness”, thus justifying the predominance of women in charge of clothing them.⁶³ The previous views, however, strengthen the suggestion that the

59 A. S. Maria, *Santuário Mariano*, op. cit., 1718, p. 200.

60 Ibid. Nowadays, this sculpture is still surrounded in secrecy and its appearance without clothing is a mystery to most inhabitants of Vila Viçosa, despite having been subjected to a restoration in 1989. Three women are in charge of re-dressing it and the statue is still wrapped with a white cloth, followed by several layers of white undergarments and finally the rich robes assembled by dozens of pins.

61 K. M. Rudy, “Kissing images, unfurling rolls, measuring wounds, sewing badges and carrying talismans: considering some Harley Manuscripts through the physical rituals they reveal”, *eBLJ – The Electronic British Library Journal*, 2011, article 5, p. 10. On this subject read C. Sciacca, “Raising the curtain on the use of textiles in manuscripts”, in: *Weaving, Veiling, and Dressing. Textiles and their Metaphors in the Late Middle Ages*, eds. K. M. Rudy, B. Baert, Turnhout, 2007, pp. 161–190.

62 M. Bagnoli, “Dressing the Relics. Some Thoughts on the Custom of Relic Wrapping in Medieval Christianity”, in: *Matter of Faith: An Interdisciplinary Study of Relics and Relic Veneration in the Medieval Period*, eds. J. Robinson, L. de Beer, A. Harnden, London, 2014, pp. 102–104.

63 Regarding the Virgen de las Nieves de Santa Cruz de la Palma (Canary Islands), Friar Diego Henríquez tells how the image of Our Lady once turned her head when being clothed because there were men watching: “[...] in the midst of astonishment, it occurred to them that this gesture seemed to be consequence or sign of the virginal modesty, and that [the Virgin] did not like its image to be stripped in the presence of men [...]”, quoted after: J. Pérez Morera, “Imperial Señora Nuestra: el vestuario y el joyero de la Virgen de las Nieves”, in: *María. y es la Nieve de su Nieve Favor, Esmalte y Matiz*, eds. J. Pérez Morera, C. Rodrigues Morales et al., Santa Cruz de la Palma, 2010, p. 42. On this subject see M. Albert Llorca, op. cit.

clothing layers and silver grids exist to emphasize the special status of this miraculous image and, by consequence, the privilege of a few elected to touch and clothe it, while, paradoxically, implementing “ritual layers” that enriched the interactive experience.

Furthermore, the tale of its animation through bleeding after the attempt to know the material in which it is made, reinforces its celestial origin. In fact, Fr. Agostinho states the statue must have been made by the hands of angels and appeared to Nuno Álvares Pereira (1360–1431), its supposed true commissioner, as a recognition for his devotion.⁶⁴ The animation through blood, tears, sweat or movement, recurrent throughout *Santuário Mariano*, testifies the sacredness of the objects, warns against the devotees’ misbehavior and punishes it, but at the same time highlights the value of proximity and how that honor was granted to just a few.

Throughout Friar Agostinho’s volumes, the distancing tools are not always as perceptible or effective. In fact, considering the numerous accounts of images leaving their churches to comfort and heal devotees in their homes through their presence and touch, the author often seems to neglect the need to control their access, privileging the propaganda of their miraculous powers instead. For instance, he narrates how in case of illness the citizens from Faro used to take *Nossa Senhora do Repouso* to their households, restoring her to her chapel when free from the evils that afflicted them.⁶⁵ Additionally, it was also usual to take parts of sculptures to believers in need. The hand of *Nossa Senhora da Paz*, from Lisbon’s Convent de *Nossa Senhora da Quietação*, was said to have cured Mother Superior Maria de Jesus when she lost her voice, in the very moment it was placed over her mouth. The same hand used to be sent to sick people outside the convent.⁶⁶ A broken finger of *Nossa Senhora do Paraíso* from the Dominican Convent in Évora was taken to the devotees who needed it, but was so frequently borrowed that it disappeared.⁶⁷ There were also several examples in which only the images of the Baby Jesus were detached and taken to the sick, as was the case with the aforementioned *Nossa Senhora do Soveral* (Borba). Fr. Agostinho mentions the dresses and golden earrings adorning this Infant Jesus witnessed his many favors.⁶⁸

The practice of taking images to private homes, however, was not unanimously accepted among the clergy. The same author narrates how in 1681, the priest Ambrosio da Conceição, from the former Convent of St. Eloy in Lisbon, opposed taking the sculpture of *Nossa Senhora do Vale* (Fig. 9) to Lady Archangela’s house, where it would be clothed, deeming it “indecent”.⁶⁹ As a matter of fact, Ambrosio was acting in accordance with Synod’s constitutions such as the ones from Cádiz (1591) and Bahia

64 A. S. Maria, *Santuário Mariano*, 1718, p. 200.

65 Ibid., pp. 466–467.

66 A. S. Maria, *Santuário Mariano*, 1707a, pp. 398–399.

67 A. S. Maria, *Santuário Mariano*, 1718, pp. 21–23.

68 Ibid., pp. 161–165.

69 A. S. Maria, *Santuário Mariano*, 1707a, pp. 186–194.



Fig. 9. “N. Snr.ª do Valle do Conv.º de S.º Eloy”, Carpinetti, Lisbon, 1760, engraving, R.S. 3247, Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal, Lisbon

(1707), which forbade the images’ removal from the church to be clothed in private homes.⁷⁰

In a meaningful account, the author of *Santuário Mariano* himself, at one point advised the priests of Almada’s *Nossa Senhora do Castelo*, to avoid such removals because “for the devotion of the sick, a mantle or a crown of the same Lady will suffice”.⁷¹

A few descriptions from the same author justify his worries on this matter. Believers were said to recklessly scratch the stone sculpture of Messejana’s *Nossa Senhora da Conceição* (Torres Vedras), in order to drink infusions made with the resulting powder, apparently a quite effective remedy,⁷² or remove pieces from the wooden sculpture of *Nossa Senhora das Areias* (Santiago de Anha) to keep “some relic of that miraculous image”.⁷³

As we will see, throughout this source and others of its genre, the term “relic” was often used to name fragments of images, or objects in contact with them.

70 J. M. Palomero Paramo, *Las virgenes de la Semana Santa de Sevilla*, Sevilla, 1983, pp. 19–20; *Constituições Primeyras do Arcebispado da Bahia Feitas e ordenadas pelo Illustrissimo e Reverendissimo Senhor D. Sebastião Monteiro da Vide [...] e aceytas em o Sinodo Diecesano que o dito Senhor celebrou em 12 de Junho do anno de 1707*, Lisbon, 1719, p. 269.

71 A. S. Maria, *Santuário Mariano*, 1707b, pp. 437–442.

72 A. S. Maria, *Santuário Mariano*, 1707b, pp. 97–105.

73 A. S. Maria, *Santuário Mariano*, 1712, pp. 234–238.

The other “relics”

As Jane Garnett and Gervase Rosser put it, “the miracle-working image should be understood as a form of extension of the relics of the saints”⁷⁴, and in the case of Marian devotion, images readily filled the void left by the Virgin’s Assumption. According to this dogma, Mary’s bodily withdrawal into Heaven meant that the only available relics of the Virgin were objects associated with her, the so-called contact relics.⁷⁵

In his recent study based on the miracle stories assembled by the lawyer Giuliano Guizzelmi in the 15th century, Robert Maniura explores the use of objects that mediated the power of the Virgin’s holy girdle and the image of *Santa Maria delle Carceri* from Prato (Tuscany). The inaccessibility of both objects to most devotees, resulted in the multiplication of the contact-related tokens that facilitated the miracles and took on the role of *brandea*.⁷⁶ Items such as pieces of cloth, threads, and replicas of the girdle, when in contact with the relic would absorb its power and extend it, taking it to devotees that could not be in the presence of the primary object.⁷⁷ A similar process happened with the miraculous painting of *Santa Maria delle Carceri*. In the majority of the stories, the miracles happened remotely, away from the shrine and even from Prato, through the mediation of prints and lead badges with the figure of *Santa Maria* on them, that is, the mass-produced souvenirs, which had touched the painting and would then touch the devotees’ bodies, relieving their ailments.⁷⁸

As stated by Garnett and Rosser, the images’ “ability to reproduce themselves”, determined the dissemination and survival of their devotions.⁷⁹ Furthermore, as Marco Faini noted, the otherworldly nature of miracles turned into a much more domestic phenomenon, as a variety of talismanic objects capable of such intercession, invaded people’s households.⁸⁰

Objects such as these, which escape easy categorization, were part of the religious experience since the Middle Ages. In her book on Christian materiality, Caroline Walker Bynum thoroughly explores their presence, arguing that there was a conscious predominance of the theme of materiality not only in devotional and

74 J. Garnett, G. Rosser, op. cit., pp. 47–48.

75 M. Holmes, op. cit., p. 33; R. Maniura, *Art and Miracle in Renaissance Tuscany*, Cambridge, 2018, p. 74.

76 D. Freedberg, op. cit., p. 129; C. W. Bynum, *Christian Materiality...*, pp. 136–137.

77 R. Maniura, op. cit., pp. 81–82.

78 Ibid., pp. 121–129.

79 J. Garnett, G. Rosser, op. cit., p. 191. On the issue of reproduction see W. Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”, in: *Walter Benjamin Illuminations. Essays and Reflections*, ed. H. Arendt, New York, 2007, pp. 217–251; H. Belting, op. cit.; A. Nagel, C. Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance*, New York, 2010, pp. 21–27. On this subject and the power derived from contact see D. Freedberg, op. cit., pp. 99–160.

80 M. Faini, “Everyday Miracles and Supernatural Agency in Sixteenth-Century Italy. The Case of the Marche”, in: *Saints, Miracles and the Image: Healing Saints and Miraculous Images in the Renaissance*, eds. Sandra Cardarelli, Laura Fenelli, Turnhout, 2017, p. 183.

theological texts produced in the Late Middle Ages, but also in the way objects were created in that specific period, showing how they literally were asked to be seen, touched, and used. According to her, around 1100 the enthusiasm surrounding several forms of holy matter was renovated not only because of the Crusades that granted access to new relics, but because of the intense proliferation of accounts mentioning bleeding crucifixes and hosts, animated paintings and statues, visions and relic metamorphosis.⁸¹

Bynum includes under the category of “holy matter” a wide variety of objects such as body, contact, effluvial and metric relics, objects and materials used in Mass and the sacraments (hosts, wine, oil, holy water), sacramentals (materials that gained their power through blessing or contact with other sacred objects,⁸² such as candles, rosaries, ribbons, prints, pilgrim badges), *Dauerwunder* (miraculous transformations that last in time), and devotional images.⁸³ The author admits such objects are not always easy to organize under a specific typology. For instance, images sometimes contain relics and, as we have seen, miraculous images or objects in contact with them appear to earn the status of relics or, at least, were thought of as such.⁸⁴

On this issue, Friar Agostinho de Santa Maria tells how Lady Ines de Bayros Quinteyro, “aia” or lady-in-waiting of Almada’s *Nossa Senhora de Monte Sião*, accidentally broke a sculpture’s finger when changing its clothes and saved it with the intention of fixing it. Later, she found out the sculpture had miraculously fixed itself and that no finger was missing. She then kept the broken one as a valuable jewel “placing it in a reliquary and thus enriching her home”.⁸⁵ Obviously, descriptions such as these were rare as they could excite the devotees to continue their most reckless practices.

Most believers relied on more accessible things instead. Devotees of Argoncilhe’s *Nossa Senhora do Campo* used to take dirt from her shrine to drink at home, or remove powder from the sculpture’s stone pedestal.⁸⁶ Other common “relics” were the images’ rosary beads, their measures and ribbons that adorned or touched them. All of these, when applied on the sick bodies or pregnant women, guaranteed relief and successful childbirths. The oil from the altar’s lamps was equally fruitful. Friar Agostinho describes its effects on himself when he lived in Évora’s Convent of *Nossa Senhora das Mercês*. In 1677, two tumors appeared in one of his knees. After he was told by a surgeon that the healing would take long and he would need to stay in bed for three months, he went to the altar of *Nossa Senhora das Mercês* (Fig. 10)

81 C. W. Bynum, *Christian Materiality...*, pp. 18–21.

82 On such objects see W. A. Christian, Jr., *Apariciones en Castilla y Cataluña (Siglos XIV–XVI)* (Apparitions in Late Medieval and Renaissance Spain), Madrid, 1990, pp. 125–128, 146–148, 225–226, 260–262 and idem, *Religiosidad local...*, pp. 124–127, 160–162.

83 C. W. Bynum, *Christian Materiality...*, pp. 25–28.

84 Ibid., p. 29.

85 A. S. Maria, *Santuário Mariano*, 1707b, pp. 443–450.

86 A. S. Maria, *Santuário Mariano*, Lisbon, 1721, p. 509.

and using oil from her lamp he drew two crosses on both tumors. Next morning, they were gone.⁸⁷

The desire to collect such objects is present in other sources such as the news from *Gazeta de Lisboa* (Lisbon's Gazette). In an account from 8 April 1728, we are told that during the procession of St. Sebastian in Vila de Rei (Castelo Branco) that went out to the streets to stop the heavy rains, the martyr's sculpture started to sweat copiously "as it was made of snow and was exposed to the sun". Everyone present received the sweat with their handkerchiefs and took the ribbons and flowers adorning the image, dividing them in many parts, "to keep them as witnesses of such a prodigious accident".⁸⁸



Fig. 10. *Nossa Senhora das Mercês*, former Convent of *Nossa Senhora das Mercês* (Évora), 17th or 18th century (?), processional banner, oil on wood, Museu Nacional Frei Manuel do Cenáulo, Évora. Photo Teresa Crespo

87 A. S. Maria, *Santuário Mariano*, 1718, pp. 35–39.

88 *Gazeta de Lisboa*, 1728, no. 15, Quinta-feira, 8 April, p. 120.

These stories clearly demonstrate the intense desire to convey the image's presence and power to the faithful, particularly the sick and dying. In this context, as Friar Agostinho advised when describing the aforementioned *Nossa Senhora do Castelo* (Almada), the crowns and clothes were the perfect solution not only for their portability, but because they echoed the sculpture's visual presence. Additionally, most images owned several of each.

Therefore, although the dressing-up of sculptures was often a distancing mechanism because it allowed only a limited group of people to be part of it and it concealed the true appearance of many statues, the clothes could, in fact, contribute to a greater proximity and interaction between the holy objects and the devotees. As Bynum stated, "adorning an image is a reciprocal and processual gesture; it gives agency to both the one doing the clothing and the one clothed".⁸⁹ Here, I would like to add that "the one doing the clothing" should not be understood as only the one participating in the dressing ritual per se, but every devotee contributing to that practice, namely, the ones who offered gowns or jewels to the images.

The statues' clothes: reminders and mediators

According to Friar Agostinho's accounts, the images' crowns, mantles, and other clothing items were recurrently petitioned by sick believers who quickly recovered as soon as they touched them.⁹⁰

As reported by the testimony of Lady Luíza Maria de Sá, in the 1660s her father Francisco Bahia suffered from a serious crisis of gout. He was examined by the best doctors from the University of Coimbra, and no one could find any remedy for him. He then turned to Vilarinho's *Nossa Senhora da Piedade* and asked for her crown. When it was brought to him, he vowed to the Virgin and Christ and placed the crown on his head and then touched his entire body with it, immediately recovering from the intense pain he felt.⁹¹

The sculptures' mantles were amongst the most frequently borrowed items. In 1658, Queen Luísa de Gusmão (1613–1666) took the cloak of *Nossa Senhora do Bom Despacho* from the College of St. Agostinho in Lisbon to her son and future King Afonso VI (1643–1683), who was severely sick. He recovered as soon as the garment

89 C. W. Bynum, "'Crowned with many crowns': nuns and their statues in late-medieval Wienhausen", *The Catholic Historical Review*, 2015, volume 101, no. 1, p. 27.

90 On the miraculous and symbolic power of textiles and the Virgin's clothing, particularly the mantle and the girdle, see E. Silvestrini, "Abiti e Simulacri. Itinerario attraverso mitologie, narrazioni e riti. II. Le Vesti", in: *Donne, Madonne, Dee. Abito sacro e riti di vestizione, gioiello votivo, "vestitrici": un itinerario antropologico in area lagunare veneta*, ed. R. Pagnozzato, Padova, 2003, pp. 32–54; K. M. Rudy, "Introduction: Miraculous Textiles in *Exempla* and Images from the Low Countries", in: *Weaving, Veiling, and Dressing. Textiles and their Metaphors in the Late Middle Ages*, eds. K. M. Rudy, B. Baert, Turnhout, 2007, pp. 1–36.

91 A. S. Maria, *Santuário Mariano*, 1712, pp. 560–562.

was applied to his body.⁹² The mantles of *Nossa Senhora do Pranto* from Salto⁹³ and *Nossa Senhora da Piedade* from Ponte de Lima,⁹⁴ were especially asked for in cases of hazardous childbirths.

The coif of *Nossa Senhora das Necessidades* from the Convent of S. Francisco in Guarda was held as a valuable jewel for its thaumaturgic powers and was often taken to sick devotees who would immediately be healed when placing the cap on their heads.⁹⁵ In the case of Carocedo's *Nossa Senhora da Assunção* (Bragança), it was one of her girdles that was held as miraculous and useful in dangerous childbirths or when mothers lacked milk to feed their babies.⁹⁶

These examples from *Santuário Mariano* are corroborated by other sources that show these were conventional practices across the Catholic world, testifying the faith in such apotropaic objects. Ceballos, for instance, confirms this longstanding practice in Spain, informing that when the sculptures were renovated, their garments were often divided amongst devotees, "functioning as relics that transmitted something of their miraculous power."⁹⁷

The story of Carnide's *Nossa Senhora da Luz* (Lisbon), published in 1610 by Friar Roque do Soveral, records several miracles performed through the sculpture's crown, mantles, and belt, which are clearly associated with relics by the author.⁹⁸

Similar to Vila Viçosa's *Nossa Senhora da Conceição*, this fully sculpted image of the standing Virgin with the Baby Jesus on her left arm, was of unknown matter for both Friar Roque and Friar Agostinho. According to the first, the image was found wearing a white satin vest that still existed at the time and no one dared examine the sculpture's material.⁹⁹ Both authors state the ones who tried were attacked by fever¹⁰⁰ and blindness.¹⁰¹ Following the orientations from Trent and the ensuing Synods, Friar Roque condemned the ones who clothed the images of the Virgin as if these were courtesans' portraits, but explained it was common and acceptable to adorn miraculous images with a tunic and mantle of modest shape.¹⁰² Furthermore, the author excused the use of rich fabrics on such images stating the following:

The celestial queen agrees that she is dressed here with brocades and fabrics for two reasons: firstly, because she only receives them in her Image, not [...] in herself, and thus

92 A. S. Maria, *Santuário Mariano*, 1707a, pp. 297–300.

93 A. S. Maria, *Santuário Mariano*, 1712, pp. 150–154.

94 Ibid., pp. 173–175.

95 A. S. Maria, *Santuário Mariano*, Lisbon, 1711, pp. 22–28.

96 A. S. Maria, *Santuário Mariano*, Lisbon, 1716, pp. 591–594.

97 A. R. G. de Ceballos, op. cit., p. 28. Nowadays in Andalusia it is still possible to buy pieces of sculptures' cloaks as souvenirs, usually named as "relics".

98 R. Soveral, *Historia do Insigne Aparecimento de N. Senhora da Luz & suas obras maravilhosas*, Lisbon, 1610.

99 Ibid., fls. 16v–17.

100 Ibid.

101 A. S. Maria, *Santuário Mariano*, 1707a, p. 105.

102 R. Soveral, op. cit., fl. 105v.

accepts the richness and preciousness of the dresses as a thing of the Image [...], secondly, so as not to contradict the devotion of those who want to make her rich offerings[...]¹⁰³

Nossa Senhora da Luz's remaining attires date from the 18th to the 21st centuries.¹⁰⁴ Because the sculpture was not meant to be clothed, the garments that adorn the figures of Our Lady and the Baby Jesus are shaped more like bibs rather than full dresses, but this feature is imperceptible because the mantles wrap most of the sculpture, giving it its triangular outline. The sets of clothing do not vary much in color or materials, privileging the white and blue silk satin, usually embroidered with golden or silver thread garlands and stars, and topped off with golden or silver thread galloons (Figs. 11, 12).



Fig. 11. Dress of *Nossa Senhora da Luz*, late 18th century or 19th century (?), silk, golden thread embroidery with coloured metallic foil and golden thread galloon, Church of *Nossa Senhora da Luz*, Carnide. Photo by Diana Pereira

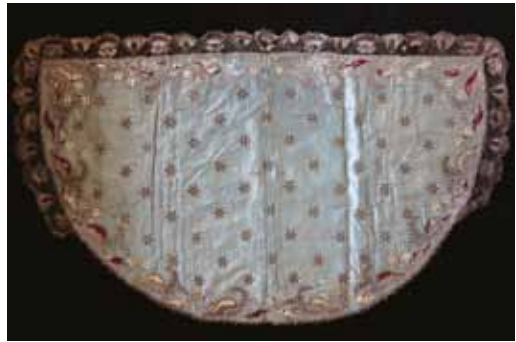


Fig. 12. Mantle of *Nossa Senhora da Luz*, late 18th or 19th century (?), silk, silver thread embroidery with coloured metallic foil and silver thread galloon, Church of *Nossa Senhora da Luz*, Carnide. Photo by Diana Pereira

As mentioned above, Friar Roque often referred to the image's crown, mantles, and belt as relics. In an especially enlightening account, the author witnesses the perks of such objects which allowed the image's power to reach distant parts of the empire. According to Soveral, the Archbishop of Goa, Friar Mateus de Medina (1588–1593), took a mantle with him when he went to India, lending it to several people in need. The success was such that Diogo Pereira from Baçaim (Vasai), hoping to help a friend in distress, asked the Archbishop for the mantle. The prelate, fearing that this could be lost during the trip, sent him a piece he cut from it instead.¹⁰⁵ Friar Roque takes advantage of this episode to talk at length about how the part is the same as the whole, making a clear association between the piece of the image's mantle and a relic. Illustrating how "Saint Paul's belt and shroud healed the

¹⁰³ Ibid., fl. 106.

¹⁰⁴ It is a growing collection because dresses continue to be offered to the image nowadays.

¹⁰⁵ R. Soveral, op. cit., fls. 117v–118.

sick” and “Saint Bibiana’s ashes resurrected a young boy”, he explains that things such as the threads from Christ’s clothes or Saint Francis girdle were “celebrated and placed on reliquaries”, “as if each of these things were the whole from which they were taken”.¹⁰⁶

The fragmentation, reproduction and extension of images shown in all these stories, either through the detachment of their fingers, hands or Baby Jesus, the lending of their crowns, mantles, girdles or even small pieces cut from these, provided access to the primary object and their power, spreading its reach beyond the church and promoting its cult. This was possible because, as in the case of relics (body fragments that were also larger wholes), these objects indicated, evoked and transmitted a power that lied elsewhere, not in the image, but in God himself.¹⁰⁷

By now it should be clear that clothes were not just adornments used according to the different colors of liturgical celebrations and, as stated by Trexler, “the motivations for dressing sculptures exceeded the desire for visual realism”.¹⁰⁸ They were, in fact, mediating layers which played a vital role in the reciprocal communication between image and devotee, becoming portable extensions of the former’s presence and power.

Concerning St. Hedwig’s iconography, Jacqueline E. Jung, suggests that shoes, and clothing in general, have, besides their symbolic, aesthetic, and practical value, a “presence value” as “material indices of human lives” and the “presence of the absent body” as they remind the people who wear or wore them.¹⁰⁹

106 Ibid., fls. 118–119v. Soveral also describes many miracles made through a belt whose origin was unknown. Some believed it had belonged to Pero Martinz, who found the image, others that it belonged to the sculpture being one of its relics. The leather belt, lined with blue velvet and golden thread and featuring “antique and foreign looking” silver clasps, was associated with several healing miracles both in men and women, but Friar Roque informed it was especially effective for childbirths such as the abovementioned girdle from Carocedo. Being especially useful to Pero Furtado de Mendonça, before dying the devotee asked his brother-in-law, Martim de Castro dos Rios, to “garnish the holy girdle”. The piece was then wrapped inside another belt made of crimson velvet designed to allow devotees to see the worn out girdle. The “holy relic”, said Soveral, was then a “beautiful jewel, wrapped up in a crimson taffeta inside a curious box”, its reliquary. Ibid., fls. 120v–128v. Concerning the proliferation of miraculous belts or girdles belonging to Our Lady, such as the one supposedly offered by the Virgin to a clergyman in 1178 and kept in Tortosa’s Cathedral, and which was used by women during childbirths, W. Christian suggests these were possibly “mides” or measures, metric-relics the pilgrims used to bring from the Holy Land. W. A. Christian, Jr., *Apariciones...*, p. 72. Roque do Soveral does not associate the belt with the Virgin herself or, for instance, Prato or Tortosa’s holy girdles. However, this proliferation noted by W. Christian hints, firstly, at the wide diffusion of such legends in Europe, and, secondly, at a common use and association of image-related objects with relics of saints.

107 On the fragmentation as the whole see C. Hahn, “The Voices of the Saints: Speaking Reliquaries”, *Gesta*, 1997, vol. 36, no. 1, pp. 20–31; C. W. Bynum, *Christian Materiality...*, pp. 192–193, 208–210.

108 R. Trexler, “Habiller”..., p. 195. On the issue of colors and the liturgical calendar read note 21.

109 J. E. Jung, “The Boots of Saint Hedwig. Thoughts on the Limits of the Agency of Things”, in: *The Agency of Things in Medieval and Early Modern Art. Materials, Power and Manipulation*,

Fr. Agostinho's description of martyr Thecla Ignacia's burial (1656) is particularly interesting for this argument:

Her sweet memory was not buried with her body; because it is kept in the hearts of the residents of that republic; everyone [...] cherishes her images, rosaries, medals and cilices as precious treasures and outstanding relics; and even her poor and old clothes were divided to satisfy the devotion of everyone who insisted in having even if just a thread.¹¹⁰

According to the author, before dying the nun had asked her family to burn her clothes because she feared they would be venerated as relics, but God had awarded her with that veneration because of her humility.¹¹¹

In several societies, clothing and cloths are believed to connect and mediate the human and spiritual worlds, the natural and supernatural, besides protecting against evil and disease.¹¹²

The tradition of covering the Kaaba with the *kiswah*, for instance, dates back to the earliest Muslim leaders who are recorded to adorn it with textiles of several colors and materials.¹¹³ The *kiswah* is understood to offer safety and protection. According to Richard McGregor, every year a new one was sent from Cairo to Mecca during the Hajj and it paraded through the Egyptian capital at least since 1263. An account from 1679 informs that the *kiswah* circulated "in pieces, mounted on wooden frames, and being touched by the crowds as a source of blessing". When on display at the shrine-mosque of Husayn, people could visit it, touch it and cut small pieces from it as blessings or *baraka*.¹¹⁴ McGregor suggests the *kiswah* made it possible for the faithful to be closer to the Kaaba, although they could not make the mandatory Hajj. According to him the Kaaba was not a "distant idealized and imagined goal" that few would ever reach, for it was attained through the "seeing, touching, parading, and viewing" of such object,¹¹⁵ which draws parallels to how the sculptures, clothes or "relics" replicated the originals' presence and power away from their shrines.

Conclusion

I would like to conclude by stressing the fact that clothes and jewels played multiple roles in the cyclical material relationship between miraculous images and devotees.

eds. G. Jurkowlanec, I. Matyjaszkiewicz, Z. Sarnecka, New York, London, 2018, pp. 175–176.
110 A. S. Maria, *Rosas do Japam, Candidas Açucenas, e Ramallete de fragrances, & peregrinas flores, colhidas no Jardim da Igreja do Japão [...]*, Lisbon, 1709, p. 147.

111 Ibid., p. 147.

112 A. Hermkens, "Clothing as embodied experience of belief", in: *Religion and Material Culture. The Matter of Belief*, ed. D. Morgan, London, New York, 2010, p. 231.

113 R. McGregor, "Dressing the Ka'ba from Cairo: the aesthetics of pilgrimage to Mecca", in: *Religion and Material Culture. The Matter of Belief*, ed. D. Morgan, London, New York, 2010, pp. 247–261.

114 Ibid., pp. 256–260.

115 Ibid., p. 261.

More than mere embellishments or lifelike prosthetics, clothes were extensions of their sculptures' presence and consequently their power, behaving as "contact relics". They were often *ex-votos* and therefore testimonies of such power and, lastly, according to Golsenne's suggestion, they were activators of the devotees' belief in that very power.

Being an essential aspect for the study of sculpture, the practice of dressing and adorning images of saints is equally fundamental to understanding the sensorial experience of devotees.

In the collective imagination, they became strong and unavoidable features of the miraculous images' visual and textural identities, as we can see when comparing the appearance of sculptures such as *Nossa Senhora da Conceição* from Vila Viçosa, with and without the dresses (Fig. 7, 8). The stone-cold and stiff statue was replaced by a majestic token wrapped in rich fabrics with golden trimmings and shiny gemstones – multiple layers of devotional meaning, secrecy, ritual, and privilege that require handling and have a tremendous impact on the senses.

Beneath the layers of rich robes, undergarments and the curly wig, hides a bald head that resulted from its adaptation to the crown, natural hair and mantle. The arms are not articulated and the eyes are not made of glass. Statues such as this were not flesh or lifelike, but when clothed as humans, frequently in similar fashions as the ones worn by devotees, they could certainly provide a sense of familiarity and proximity. Despite the lingering archaism and estrangement, their adornments invited and offered tactile engagement. The people who clothed them could not avoid touching or embracing them during that process. In turn, their cloaks and belts were wrapped around people's bodies and their caps and crowns placed on their heads in times of distress.

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