Konsthistorisk tidskrift/Journal of Art History

ISSN: 0023-3609 (Print) 1651-2294 (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/skon20

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To cite this article: Stina Fallberg Sundmark & Elisabet Regner (2025) Images of Outdoor Devotion in Townscapes and Landscapes During the Middle Ages. Some Examples from Sweden, Denmark and Finland, Konsthistorisk tidskrift/Journal of Art History, 93:4, 284-305, DOI: 10.1080/00233609.2025.2534576

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/00233609.2025.2534576

Published online: 11 Aug 2025.

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Images of Outdoor Devotion in Townscapes and Landscapes During the Middle Ages. Some Examples from Sweden, Denmark and Finland

Stina Fallberg Sundmark and Elisabet Regner

Abbreviations

DM	Dalecarlia County Museum
GF	Gotland's Museum
SDHK	The Main Catalogue of Diplomatarium Suecanum, Swedish National Archives
SHM	Swedish History Museum

Introduction

In the late Middle Ages, space for devotion was not solely connected to the interior of the church or home. Devotion could also take place outside, for instance at liturgical feasts such as *Festum Corporis Christi* when the Host was carried in procession or at processions over the fields with relics and images giving blessings for a good harvest.[1] When the priest walked to a sick or dying person to administer the sacraments of penance, communion and extreme unction he carried the Host and people would kneel and pray to the sacramentally present Christ who passed through their everyday spaces of dwelling and working.[2] Landscapes can therefore be seen as important in medieval religious life.[3]

In this article, we will discuss devotional images in outdoor spaces in both urban and rural environments with examples from late-medieval Sweden (including present-day Finland) and Denmark, and the religious practices that may have been associated with outdoor spaces. Our first starting point is that the importance and meaning of space changes over time, and this was true for the medieval and early modern landscape as well.[4] Landscape is intertwined with memory and is the product of many layers of meaning produced over time.[5] In the early modern period, the term landscape did not necessarily denote any tangible or real space, but rather an artistic representation of a given tract of land.[6] While the renaissance view of landscape painting is not universally applicable to medieval art, place, space and nature played a significant role in medieval life and this is reflected in medieval art as well.[7] Medieval landscape studies building on ritual, agency, practice and symbolism have shown how aristocratic landscapes were constructed to create legitimacy and

power through control over movement, performance and action.[8]

Similar perspectives have been applied to urban spaces, arguing for a practice-based understanding where urbanity itself is seen as the continuous formation of practices situated within urban space and specific to urban living.[9] In this article we will use the term townscape for this specific urban space.[10] Neither landscape nor townscape should be seen as merely a backdrop or stage for practice, but rather that landscape and townscape is produced through human agency and practices that anchor memory and identity.

Private or personal devotion as it is understood here consists of religious practices that were performed by the individual, which either reproduced or reconfigured the vision of the order of power in the world.[11] Through ritual, some social actions are designed and shaped to distinguish and privilege what is being done over other social actions. We also aim to study medieval religion as it was lived at the individual level, where it was an ever-changing, often messy and contradictory amalgam of beliefs and practices that were not necessarily considered important by religious institutions.[12] The actual experience of religious persons is in focus, rather than institutionally defined beliefs and practices. In the medieval period, these practices include prayers said in church before, during – which means simultaneously with the liturgy performed by the priest – or after Mass, but also for instance praying the Rosary in the home, going on pilgrimage or participating in the liturgy of processions. Of particular interest here are devotional practices that took place outdoors, with a clear relationship to the surrounding landscape whether urban or rural and through interaction with material and visual culture.

In this article, we attempt to understand the use of exterior images through an understanding of visual piety in the Middle Ages. Images were of central importance in Late Medieval religious life; they were used as instruments of devotion both in the church and home. Some images were provided with indulgences that gave a certain number of years of remission from purgatory.[13] While interior images in churches as well as smaller devotional images suitable for the home have been widely studied, little interest has been paid to the possible devotional uses for exterior images. During the late Middle Ages sight was considered one of the most important bodily ways to approach God and there were many different understandings of what it meant to see something.[14] The gaze created a bodily link between the seer and that which was seen. In this article, we therefore propose that seeing these external images – whether in passing or through sustained contemplation – could be considered to create a similar link between the onlooker and that which was looked upon.

People learned from an early age to behave in certain ways – verbally as well as bodily – toward devotional images inside the church building as well as in the private setting of the home. Sources of different genres such as introductions to prayers, letters of indulgence and example stories provide valuable information on how people would act in relation to specific motifs – not (always) in relation to an explicit image/object or in a certain setting.

Our starting point is that these practices could also have informed the devotional engagement given to the same images when placed outdoors. It is likely that people would understand and possibly use similar images in similar ways, whether outside or inside the church. In the following we will

focus on exterior images that are not merely narrative or decorative, but rather share some characteristics with devotional images inside the church. These characteristics are the full-frontal perspective, but also certain known devotional motifs such as the Virgin of the rosary.

As a consequence, not only prayer instructions, but prayers themselves are important sources in this study. Prayer books were valuable objects, but also portable. Those who could afford to own a personal copy of a prayer book could also carry that to a specific devotional site out of doors. In other situations, prayers learned by heart could be said in front of a devotional images regardless of the setting.

In this article, we place emphasis on the importance of the gaze in late medieval piety for the understanding of exterior images in the urban and rural landscape. The concept of visual piety has been important for the understanding of late medieval images. The use of devotional images in the public setting of the church has been explored as well as the use of devotional images in the private setting. However, we find that images in other spaces such as exterior sculptures, or paintings on other objects have not been explored as part of late medieval religious life. Since many or all of the exterior images in this study would have been very visually accessible, we hope to contribute to the discussion of how images were made visually available. These images could also be understood within the concept of the passing glance, that formed part of a prayer in passing.[15]

In the Middle Ages the exterior and interior church building as well as the churchyard were consecrated by the bishop. Through that consecration the church building and churchyard were transformed from a place inhabited by the devil and evil spirits to a clean and holy space. That was not the case with a private building or outdoor areas outside the churchyard. However, we also acknowledge that these exterior images may have worked while gazing "en passant" on particular images outside of the churchyard, for instance on an urban building.

The questions we will explore and try to answer here are: What kind of visual culture of devotional character surrounded people in late medieval Swedish urban and rural landscape? What did visually highly accessible images mean in their urban milieu, images that people could view or gaze upon as visiting pilgrims, visitors of the town or cathedral, rural area or parish church, that they could look upon and respond to through bodily gestures, and venerate in their own everyday living and working environment? What do we know about the actors behind the images and their role in Medieval society?

Devotional images in the urban landscape

We will begin with a discussion of different urban examples of inscriptions and images in relation to devotion, with the town of Västerås in the region of Västmanland as our point of departure.

The cathedral precinct was surrounded by a wall with a portal in the south, opening up towards the rest of the town. This portal was reached from the town square through a street which has now disappeared. Facing this portal, on the southern wall of Västerås cathedral, was a stone tablet set up in 1517 by the burgher Jörgen Buntmakare. The tablet has a long inscription in Old Swedish, which indicates that it was supposed to be read by more people than those learned in

Latin. According to the inscription, indulgence of forty days is entitled for each step taken by those who walk in a godly way around the churchyard.[16] The devotional practice of walking around the churchyard is not uncommon in letters of indulgence.

On both sides of the west entrance to the cathedral are large images of saints.[17] To the right is a representation of one of the patron saints of the cathedral, St. John the Baptist and the local diocesan saint David of Munktorp (Fig. 1(b)). St. John the Baptist is wearing a gown of camelhair with the head of the camel remaining and placed between the feet of the saint. St. John the Baptist points to a lamb – Christ – lying on a book. On his halo is an inscription reading: SANCTUS IOHANNES BAPTISTA ORA [PRO NOBIS]. St. David of Munktorp is dressed as an abbot with crozier and biretta. The text on his halo reads SANCTUS DAVID ANGLICUS. The stone slab was donated in 1510 by the dean Johannes from Klingsbo (d. *c.* 1510).[18]

To the left of the west entrance is a representation of the other patron saints of the cathedral, the Virgin Mary with the Christ child, from 1515 (Fig. 1(a)). She is depicted as the Apocalyptic Madonna standing with one foot on the crescent moon and surrounded by the rays of the sun. Two angels hold a crown with stars. The apostles Peter and Paul are placed on either side of the Virgin in small size. The Virgin and the child are surrounded by a chaplet of roses in the shape of a mandorla. There are five sets of ten roses and between them five coats of arms with Christ's wounded hands, feet and heart. On either side of the Virgin's feet are

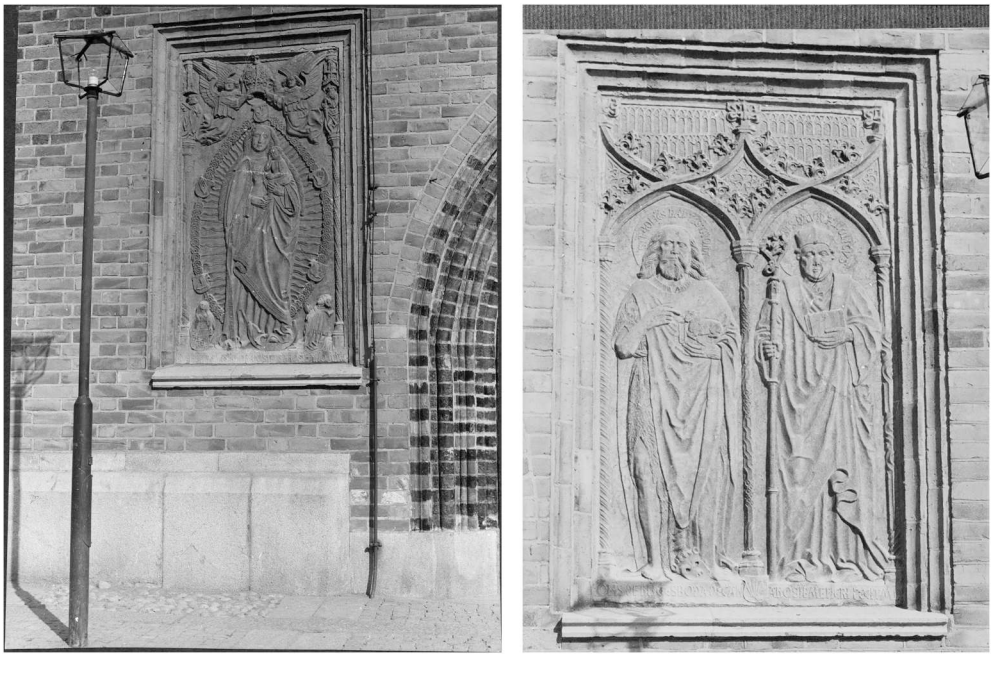

Fig. 1. (a and b) Two carved stone slabs with the Virgin Mary, St. John the Baptist and the local diocesan saint David of Munktorp at the western portal of Västerås cathedral. Photo: Riksantikvarieämbetet (CC BY).

two small figures. The one to the right is the donor of the slab and provost of the cathedral Lubertus Veslo (d. 1520).[19]

The two stone slabs are of large size and are placed highly visible on either side of the main entrance to the cathedral. That made the images accessible to people entering the cathedral for devotion or service and to those who for different reasons were present in the square in front of the cathedral with the houses for the bishop and chapter. The images on the facade were visually accessible even when the cathedral was closed.

In medieval prayer books, there are sometimes introductions to prayers. These introductions – and instructions in letters of indulgence – also encourage praying in front of an image of the Virgin Mary or other holy images of saints and directing prayers towards the saints. In some cases there are instructions for kneeling.[20] In one example a woman throws herself to the ground in front of an image of the Virgin Mary. Another tells of a bishop who invoked the Virgin Mary every time he passed her image.[21] While the prayer books can primarily be connected to the monastic sphere and the ruling elite such as the Brigittine sisters in Vadstena abbey and to Kristina Nilsdotter (Gyllenstierna c. 1494–1559), the wife of the regent Sten Sture the Younger (*c.* 1492/1493–1520), letters of indulgence and example stories indicate that these practices had a wider social relevance.

The Virgin Mary with the child surrounded by a chaplet of roses is a recurring theme in these practices.[22] The Rosary was a popular form of devotion during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In Swedish churches there are examples of larger rosaries in altar screens or mural paintings in the church or in the porch. Every smaller rose represented a Hail Mary and the larger ones a Pater Noster. These might have been used as instruments of devotion. People could have knelt in front of the representation following the roses with their gaze while praying the Rosary. Possibly, these prayers could have been accompanied by meditations over certain events in the life and death of Christ. In the representation of the Rosary, the incarnation was visualized through the virgin with the Christ child and the passion through Christ's wounded bodily parts in the larger roses. People could also pray the Rosary with the help of a string of beads. Those who did not possess a string of beads of their own could use the Rosary on the wall.[23]

People would not just act in a particular bodily way, but also express themselves verbally through prayer and appeal for intercession, as expressed in the halo of St. John the Baptist.

But the cathedral space was not the only focus of devotional practices in medieval Västerås. In the later Middle Ages, there were also two parish churches, a Dominican convent and two caritative institutions in the town. Outside the town proper were a number of smaller chapels. While the cathedral is located in the northern part of Västerås, the Dominican convent was placed close to the town limit in the south. Moving from the cathedral towards the convent, you would have passed the commercial center of the town surrounding the market square.[24] Two carved stone images are preserved from the convent (Fig. 2). The right slab shows St. Dominic holding a crucifix. At his feet is the coat of arms of the Dominicans (Ordo fratrum praedicatorum). The left stone relief shows the Apocalyptic Madonna.

The choice of motif with the Apocalyptic Madonna was most likely motivated in

Fig. 2. Two carved stone slabs from the Dominican convent in Västerås with the Apocalyptic Madonna and St. Dominic. Now in the Swedish History Museum. Photo: Ola Myrin, Swedish History Museum/SHM (CC BY).

different ways. In general, the Virgin was loved, and Marian devotion was encouraged during the fifteenth and early sixteenth century and was expressed through visual and material culture. Specifically, the motif with the Apocalyptic Madonna was popular. In addition, the Dominicans were the promotors of the devotion related to the praying of the Rosary.[25] In visual representations of the Rosary – like the one on the west facade of the cathedral – the motif with the Apocalyptic Madonna was common. The images were donated by Sten Sture the Younger and his wife Kristina Nilsdotter (Gyllenstierna). As mentioned, Kristina Nilsdotter's prayer book has survived and contains a prayer which was meant to be said in front of an image of the Virgin of the Apocalypse. To those who said this prayer Pope Sixtus IV had promised 11,000 years of indulgence. In this short prayer the Virgin Mary is addressed as the one who gave birth to the creator and savior

of the world and she is asked to pray to Jesus for the devotee and rescue from all that is evil.[26] The prayer is an example of how prayers were encouraged to be said in front of visual and material images.

Since we do not know where the two reliefs were placed in the convent – in the exterior or the interior – it is not possible to analyze whether they were accessible to ordinary people in their original location. But what we know is that in 1528 the convent was abandoned by the friars as a result of the Reformation and the buildings were demolished. The reliefs were then moved to Helgeandshuset (lat. *Hospitalis Sancti spiritus*) nearby and placed above the entrance on the facade facing the street. When Helgeandshuset was demolished in 1886 the stone slabs were incorporated in the collections of the Swedish History Museum (SHM inv. no. 21467). The two reliefs are not as large as those by the entrance of the cathedral and were placed several meters up from the ground and therefore not as accessible to people as those of the cathedral. They were, however, still highly visible on the brick wall for those who passed by in the street below. Since the reliefs were moved to the Helgeandshus at the Reformation, it remains an open question whether they would have been used for devotional practices and in what manner. However, many practices remained the same for a long time within the framework of popular religion.[27]

We now leave the town of Västerås to look at other examples of images in the urban landscape. Images of the saints also occurred outside the churchyard and on secular buildings. In 1515, sources mention an image of Our Lady of Pity/Pietà close to the church wall in the trading town of Kalmar.[28] Archaeological excavations have shown that this image may have been placed inside the south cemetery wall close to the gateway towards the town square.[29] The erection of the image was connected to an extensive phase of rebuilding of the cemetery, church wall and surrounding buildings dated to the time from 1422 into the 1440s. It is worth noting that the archaeological results indicate that the area close to the church was heavily built up and that the cemetery wall ran comparatively close to the church. When entering the churchyard through the south gateway, you would have had to pass close by the image to enter the church.

On the facades of secular houses such as town halls and private houses there were also exterior images with pious motives in stone sculpture. On the continent and in the British Isles there are several examples of exterior images on such houses. They possibly worked as instruments for orientation in the town, at least during daylight but could also function as devotional images.[30] Only a few examples are preserved from the Nordic countries. The town of Malmö, Scania, was a prominent Danish center of commerce with a large population of German traders. In Malmö an example of an image is placed in a niche under a canopy on the corner of a profane urban dwelling-house built in 1523–1525 by Mayor Jörgen Kock (1487–1556) in the town square. The stone sculpture is dated to 1525. The image is placed in a niche under a canopy and shows the Virgin Mary with the Christ child. She is presented as the Apocalyptic Madonna standing on the crescent moon. On the hem of her dress is the combination of the letters A and M, a monogram for Ave Maria. The image on the facade is a reconstruction of the much-eroded image, now in Malmö Museums. The copy is painted according to traces of paint on the original sculpture.[31]

Another type of material culture to be used devotionally in the urban landscape were Stations of the Cross, where people could contemplate in front of images with scenes from the passion of Christ. This kind of devotion included an element of mobility as people walked between stations. Outside the southern town gate of Stockholm there were three stations, probably raised in 1511 and composed of larger stone slabs with reliefs of Christ carrying his cross, Christ sinking under the burden of the cross and a crucifixion scene. The stones were erected with a certain distance between them. Only the latter one is preserved to our days (SHM inv. no. 21925). According to a chronicle from 1629 they were erected by a pious burgher of Stockholm, there was an altar at each stone and people walked there in procession.[32] According to a late seventeenth-century source, one of the stones had an inscription in Low German "Bracht Gott to lof und ehre. Bidet y alle für unsere Seele."[33] It is therefore possible that the stones had a connection to the German population in Stockholm, whether this was the burgher who erected them or perhaps the stonemason who made them.

The last of these stations of the cross was placed not far from the gallows, and there may have been a connection between the two. In the vicinity there was also a Holy Cross chapel, erected in the early fourteenth century. The chapel possibly functioned as a pilgrimage site in memory of marshal Torgils Knutsson who was executed here in 1306.[34] In Stockholm, as in most medieval towns, the gallows were placed outside the town walls but close to the southern road leading towards the town, indicating that the gallows were intentionally placed to be seen by those approaching the gate.

The town of Vadstena in Östergötland was dominated during the late Middle Ages by the Brigittine monastery. Large crowds of pilgrims from all over Sweden visited the abbey. In this monastic milieu there was a specific practice of outdoor devotion related to images. Archaeological excavations and other kinds of investigations have shown that there were no less than three different spaces for open-air devotion at stations with niches for images provided with motifs from the passion of Christ. One of the devotional paths was placed in the garden of the brothers and two in the foreyard of the abbey, in the public area. The latter two were accordingly intended for the pilgrims and other visitors.[35] The images have not survived into modern times but tablets from a parish church dealt with later in the article give an impression what they might have looked like.

Rural spaces of devotion

We have so far studied images of devotion in an urban context, but the rural landscape likewise included various devotional images and provided different kinds of space for devotion. From the parish church of Kumla, Närke, we have accounts from 1477 of the existence of tablets with images hanging in the graveyard. There is no information of any motifs of passion scenes on the tablets, but it is possible that this was the case. Forty days of indulgence were promised for those who prayed in front of those tablets.[36] While we do not have any information from Kumla regarding the actual images, there are ten wooden tablets from *c.* 1525 preserved from the parish church of Tortuna, Västmanland (SHM inv. no. 21929) (Fig. 3).[37] These tablets show depictions of scenes from the passion of Christ. Even though we do not

Fig. 3. A wooden tablet showing Christ nailed at the cross, Tortuna church. Now in the Swedish History Museum. Photo: Lennart Karlsson, Swedish History Museum/SHM (CC BY).

know where these tablets were placed in or around the church of Tortuna, the instructions from Kumla church provide perhaps an indication. They may also give an impression of what the tablets in Vadstena, mentioned above, might have looked like.[38] The use of images in the churchyard is also known from Finland. In the church of Hattula, Tavastland, in the eastern part of the church province of Uppsala (today's Finland) there are five larger wooden sculptures from the late fifteenth century. Hattula was consecrated to the Holy Cross and was a popular destination for pilgrims. It is possible that these wooden images served the needs of the pilgrims, and may even have been moved out into the graveyard to serve as Stations of the Cross.[39]

The landscape outside the churchyard was also regarded as potentially sacred. In the

woods, at the wayside and on the beach, people erected crosses made of wood or stone. On the islands of Öland and Gotland stone crosses were erected in the landscape during the Middle Ages, some of them perhaps as early as the thirteenth century. The cross at Sikawarp on Öland close to the chapel of St. Birgitta might have functioned as a blessing and marker of safety over the market held in the nearby harbor. The cross might also have served as a focus for devotion with prayers for good wind and safe harbor and gratitude for a securely completed journey.[40] Other crosses are, according to tradition, memorials to dead persons erected either close to the church or at the actual place of the death.[41] There are also examples of memory crosses with the inscription *orate pro eo/ea*.[42] This exhortation to pray for the soul of the dead man or woman was probably directed to those who passed the crosses. This indicates that pious activity could take place in relation to the crosses and that the crosses might be looked upon as sacred sites in the landscape, as certain places for prayer and devotion. On one of the crosses is a large stone relief of Christ on the cross (GF inv. no. Dep. C 138) which further emphasizes the character of this kind of crosses as instruments of devotion.

From medieval Dalecarlia in the middle of Sweden there are three smaller wooden crucifixes, about one meter high, preserved from the early sixteenth century. In Öje there is a cross with a painting of Christ on the cross on one side and the Virgin Mary on the other.[43] In Evertsberg there is a crucifix with a sloping roof, presumably evidence of its exterior use. On the front is a painted image of Christ on the cross with the inscription *inri* and on the back a representation of the Virgin Mary with a sword penetrating her heart. On the scrolls above Mary's head is the text *help jomfru maria amen*.[44] From Venjan there is a cross which has traces of a lost roof and two smaller holes at the very bottom of the cross, perhaps indicating that the cross was attached to a pole placed in the ground (DM inv. no. 52) (Fig. 4). Here too we find Christ on the one side with the inscription *fadher i thina hendher befeller iak mÿn aandhe* (Father into thy hands I commend my spirit, Luke 23:46) and the Virgin Mary on the other with a scroll with the text *hiälp os iomfru maria och hennes v sorgher* (Help us Virgin Mary and her five sorrows).[45] The double-sided images indicate that the crucifixes were placed in such a way that they were possible to view from both sides.

There is also a smaller wooden cross in the church of Liden in Medelpad. This cross is provided with another kind of iconography, namely the two saints Martin of Tours on one side cutting his cloak to share it with a beggar and on the other Margaret with a cross staff and standing on the dragon. The images are accompanied with the inscriptions *S Martina* [*sic!*] and *S Margareta*.[46] The cross is provided with a larger number of inscriptions of signs and letters which are to be interpreted as owner's marks and initials. It is difficult to date these inscriptions, but similar owner's marks occur on other medieval material. Some of them might be interpreted as monograms for Jesus and the Virgin Mary.[47] There are two inscriptions with the dates 1641 and ANO 93, which shows that the cross was in use some decades into the seventeenth century.

The function of these smaller crucifixes during the late Middle Ages is still unclear. There are holes at the lower part of the crosses, which shows that they were attached

Fig. 4. Wooden crucifix from Venjan church in Dalecarlia. Now in Dalecarlia County Museum. Photo: Dalecarlia County Museum.

to some kind of pole. This has brought up the idea that the crosses might have been used as processional crosses.[48] However, preserved processional crosses made of wood from medieval Sweden are not as high as these (65–105 cm). In addition, there would be no need to attach a sloping roof on a processional cross.[49] The roof may rather be an indication that the crosses were originally placed outdoors, either in the landscape or in the churchyard.[50] There are no preserved wooden grave crosses from medieval Scandinavia for comparison. There are later sources that mention one of these crosses as placed close to the collection box for the poor.[51]

If they were not placed in the churchyard, they might also have been placed along the wayside or at crossroads, as signs of protection on a journey that could be both long and dangerous. As such the crosses might have had the function of stations of devotion for travelers. *Legenda aurea* tells of how the devil when he came to a roadside cross was so frightened by the crucified Christ that he made a detour.[52] This says something about the idea of the roadside cross and its power to frighten away the devil and make the road and journey safe. According to a local tradition one of the crosses had the function of a wayside cross to which people might go when they were not able to come to Mass in church.[53] From late medieval England and Ireland there are many accounts of wayside crosses in the landscape with iconographic motifs like the crucifixion, the Virgin Mary with the Christ child, saints and symbols of the passion. They seem to have worked as points for pilgrims and other travelers.[54]

In the context of outdoor crosses, a large cross was erected at a well close to the church of Svinnegarn in southern Uppland. The well was one of the most popular sites of pilgrimage in medieval Sweden.[55] From medieval England we have accounts of people creeping to the cross for veneration as a part of the liturgy on Good Friday.[56] Wherever the crosses were originally placed, the images make it likely that they could be used as instruments of devotion when people meditated upon the passion of Christ and the co-passion of the Virgin Mary.

Some of the inscriptions consist of direct prayers as they address Jesus or the Virgin Mary for help. The longer one to the Virgin Mary is a prayer for help and protection from sorrows, the latter perhaps mirroring the mourning of the Virgin Mary. Three of four crosses have images of Christ on the cross and the Virgin Mary. This combination with Christ on the one side and the Virgin Mary on the other was common during the whole Middle Ages, e.g. on smaller personal crucifixes made of metal to wear around the neck.[57] This is an expression of the passion of Christ and the mourning and co-passion of his mother (*Mater dolorosa*). The sorrow of the Virgin Mary standing at the cross on Calvary (John 19:25–27) is expressed in extreme form when she is represented with a sword piercing her heart (heralded in Luke 2:35). All of this was related to the dogma of the Virgin Mary taking active part in the act of salvation (*Corredemptrix*). The Virgin Mary with her compassionate attitude became a role model for people and an image with the mother of sorrows became a focal point for contemplation.[58] A visual or material representation of the cross with Christ as savior and his mother taking active part in that salvation was in itself looked upon as providing hope for salvation to those who gazed upon that image.

The visual and material cross and crucifix was highly present and used in late medieval liturgy and personal devotion; in the church

interior, graveyard, landscape and domestic sphere. The crucifix was regarded as an instrument for protection against the devil, as visual and material focus during personal meditation upon Christ's passion and as a sign of salvation. The cross was even looked upon as Christ himself.[59] This means that crosses in the landscape would have been regarded as giving protection to the travelers and as places for devotion in people's everyday settings in the open air. Through the crosses Christ and the saints were present in the landscape in a visual way.

There are no direct accounts from late medieval Sweden of how people acted in relation to crosses in the landscape. An account from the first half of the eighteenth century tells of how people used to kneel and make the sign of the cross when passing a cross on their way to the church.[60] This might be an indication of continuity with late medieval practice.

Another space for devotion was semi-exterior. The lichgate (*stiglucka*) was built into the wall around the churchyard. In many of these lichgates there are one or more preserved larger niches. They probably functioned as spaces for devotional images, either painted on the wall of the niche or wooden images placed there temporarily. If there were images in the niches the lichgates might have functioned as accessible chapels for travelers and others when the church was closed.[61]

The porch of the church is another space which could house images for devotion. Many late medieval porches in the Nordic countries were provided with mural paintings with motifs related to devotion such as the Apocalyptic Madonna in a rosary, the vernicle of St. Veronica and the man of sorrows alone or in the context of the Mass of St. Gregory. In some porches there are larger niches on the east facade with Eucharistic motifs which together indicate that there might have been an altar.[62] The porch could also house wooden sculpture. According to a letter of indulgence from 1455 Archbishop Johannes of Uppsala offered 40 days of indulgence to everyone who performed their prayers in front of an image of the Virgin Mary in the porch or lichgate (*in porticu*) of the parish church of Sånga, Uppland.[63]

There are also examples of images on the facade of the rural church building, which might be interpreted as devotional images. One such example is the monumental reliefs from the middle of the fourteenth century on the right-hand side of the southern portal of the parish church of Stånga, Gotland (Fig. 5). The two upper reliefs represent the flagellation and deposition from the cross, scenes related to the passion of Christ while the lowest relates to the incarnation with the adoration of the Magi.[64] The interesting thing here – apart from its placement on the facade – is the position of the Virgin and the Christ child. They are not sitting in the ordinary setting of the stable but on a raised plinth under a canopy. This arouses associations with a shrine placed on an altar. Perhaps this association was intended, with the aim to stimulate people to act like the Holy Magi and in a similar way as people would act in front of the image of the Virgin Mary on the side altar inside the church. Different letters of indulgence state how people would act bodily and verbally in front of an image of the Virgin Mary and other saints, namely kneel in a venerable manner praying one or more Pater Noster and Hail Mary.[65]

Bearing in mind that the church contained precious objects it was probably not open and unlocked all the time. In that case the lichgate, the porch or images on the facade might have served pilgrims and

Fig. 5. Stone reliefs at the southern portal of Stånga church, Gotland. Photo: Riksantikvarieämbetet (CC BY).

others who passed by in their everyday devotion.[66] A similar phenomenon was the hagioscope, an opening in the church wall through which people could behold the Host displayed in a monstrance or another sacred vessel on the altar.[67]

The churchyard as devotional space

As several of the examples above have shown, the churchyard seems to have been a common focus for devotional practices in both urban and rural space. Images of the saints, inscriptions, stations of the cross, crucifixes and sculptures with altars seem to have been used within this space. In both the urban and the rural landscape, the churchyard represented a bounded and clearly defined sacred space. The church building with its churchyard was the core of the parish. The building and surrounding area were consecrated by the bishop and therefore connected with certain regulations, which

gave them status of asylum and were to be protected from crime.[68] Apart from being the place for buried ancestors, the space could be used for liturgical processions at various times of the year.[69] Different social, economic and ritual practices, such as things, markets, burials and processions could be performed within this sacred space. Access to burial in consecrated ground was restricted, since only those who were baptized could be buried there, and the location of burial was determined by age, class and gender.[70] Crimes committed in the churchyard were punished more severely than the same crimes were if committed elsewhere, and the ground would have to be consecrated again. It was therefore also a normative space where social rules were enforced.

Walking around the churchyard was a fairly common prerequisite to earn a certain amount of indulgence. People would pray for the pious deceased resting in the churchyard. Sometimes the prayers are specified as Pater Noster and Hail Mary.[71] In medieval prayer books there are also specific prayers to be said in the church or in the churchyard. The prayers address the souls of the dead, promising to pray for them to gain their eternal and heavenly peace. Christ is addressed directly and with reference to his passion he is asked to save the souls.[72] In a letter of indulgence for the parish church of St. Helena in Götene, which was a popular site for pilgrims in the diocese of Skara, it is stated that a certain place was arranged in the churchyard for praying circulation.[73] A legend originally in the *Legenda aurea* states that it was meritorious to pray for the dead. This *exemplum* is found in the *Copia exemplorum* by Magister Mathias (Mathias Ouidi, d. 1350th) and talks about a man who used to say a prayer or sing a psalm to the souls in Purgatory when he passed a churchyard. Once he was taken by surprise by his enemies. He was rescued by the grateful dead who rose from their graves and drove away the enemies.[74] The *exemplum* is also presented in a visual form, as the motif "The grateful dead" in mural paintings in parish churches.[75] Altogether the sources indicate the possibility of performing personal devotion alone or together with others in the churchyard. The occurrence of images such as the Virgin of the rosary on the exterior of churches should be seen in this context.

Actors and devotional images in the townscape

The creation and use of medieval devotional images and art spaces involved many different actors ranging from the donors providing the financial means, through the craftsmen providing the raw materials, the artist producing the image, the priests saying mass at the side altars and the people that said their prayers in front of the image. For a lot of the works discussed here, most of these different actors are unknown. However, some of them are known from written sources.

The most well-known among these are Sten Sture the Younger and his wife Kristina Nilsdotter (Gyllenstierna). Sten Sture's father Svante Nilsson (*c.* 1460–1511/1512) was regent from 1504, and his son Sten became involved in national politics from an early age. Sten was dubbed a knight when he was only four or five, was sent on diplomatic missions at 17 and became regent of Sweden at 23. His wife, Kristina Nilsdotter (Gyllenstierna), was also born into the highest nobility. After the death of her husband, she held Stockholm castle during the Danish siege of 1520. Kristina Nilsdotter (Gyllenstierna) retained both symbolic and political importance for a time after the

fall of Stockholm and the later victory over the Danish and the accession to the throne of Gustav I (Vasa, 1496–1560). She also appears to have been a deeply devout woman.[76]

Sten Sture and his wife made large donations to Västerås cathedral, most notably a large Flemish altarpiece where they were both depicted as donors. According to the inscription it was donated by the couple in 1516.[77] It was accordingly bequeathed during their lifetime, although the different inscriptions point to the time after their death. There are appeals to the Virgin Mary to remember and receive the souls of the couple, and living people standing in front of the altarpiece are exhorted to pray for their souls. The couple most likely chose the cathedral of Västerås for their grand donation to further manifest the cathedral as Sten Sture's paternal burial site. His grandfather Nils Sture (d. 1494) was commander (*hövitsman*, *befälhavare*) over Västerås castle and over Kopparberg and Dalecarlia 1466–1493 and both he and his wife Birgitta Karlsdotter (d. 1494) were buried in the Sture choir of the cathedral. Sten Sture's father Svante Nilsson was also buried there together with the five-year-old boy Mauritz Sture (d. 1493).[78] However, the date of the altarpiece is also interesting. At that time Sten Sture was involved in a conflict with the archbishop Gustav Trolle (1488–1535), part of the political struggles of the early sixteenth century.[79] This was a time when manifesting religious and family ties to one of the larger Swedish urban centers would also have had political significance.

The reliefs from the Dominican convent bear the arms of both Sten Sture and Kristina Nilsdotter (Gyllenstierna), which may indicate that the reliefs were donated between 1511, when the couple got married, and 1520 when Sten died.[80] It seems plausible that this donation may have been made at the same time as the donations to Västerås cathedral. The provision of images by the nobility for the personal devotion of others should perhaps be seen as motivated by several intersecting factors. As a donation to the church, it provided for the redemption of the soul of the donor. It also made manifest the donors' social importance and prestige and allowed the nobility to act as religious examples for those of lower social status, by providing a highly tangible tool in their daily lives.

The importance of the nobility as actors in the creation of religious space and images is hardly surprising, but they are by no means alone. On the exterior of Västerås cathedral there are also images donated by a dean and a provost of the cathedral, and an inscription by a burgher who was a furrier (Old Swedish *buntmakare*). Not much is known about the lives of these individuals but they were probably prominent figures in the town. While a dean and a provost of the cathedral would have belonged to the higher social groups, tax records from Stockholm indicate that in the 1460s furriers paid markedly below the average in tax.[81] On the other hand, in the early sixteenth century Mårten Nilsson Skinnare became one of the most wealthy and prominent men in medieval Sweden. Alongside a trade in furs and skins he also had substantial economic interests in copper ore from the mines in Bergslagen and founded a Rosary fraternity in Vadstena.[82] It is possible that Jörgen Buntmakare had a similarly prominent position in the town of Västerås.

Jörgen Kock is another example of burghers providing imagery in the urban landscape. Jörgen Kock was a burgher in Malmö by 1517 at the latest, in 1523 he is mentioned as mayor of Malmö and was knighted in 1526. In 1517 and 1518 he was taxed 6 marks, among the highest in the town. Jörgen Kock was a coiner

operating the Malmö mint, and had married Citze Kortsdatter who was the daughter of a prominent Copenhagen trader. In 1522 he acquired the plot of land and the year after he began the construction work on what would be a very fine brickwork house at the town square.[83] Jörgen Kock's house was finished in 1525. That is also the date of the image of the Virgin Mary and the Christ child placed on the facade mentioned earlier. Regarding the function of the image, it had two directions; the Virgin Mary was probably regarded as protector of the house and those dwelling and serving there, but the image also likely functioned as a devotional focal point for people in the town square passing by below her. According to the sources, Jörgen Kock was in 1527 instrumental in bringing the young reformer Claus Mortensen (1499–1575) to Malmö.[84] By the reformers in general, the Virgin Mary was not questioned as a role model and she kept her prominent position as the mother of Jesus. Questioned was however the view that she would be an essential actor for the salvation of humanity.[85] In popular piety the Virgin Mary retained her distinguished position into the nineteenth century and images of her were saved in the churches several centuries after the Reformation.[86] Perhaps this particular image also continued to play some kind of role in the urban space through the centuries?

Perspectives on image and devotion in the urban and rural landscape

In this article, we have attempted to approach medieval practices of devotion through the use of images in outdoor spaces. The emphasis has been less on liturgy or even the theological interpretation of the symbolism in the image, and more on their commission and reception. Some aspects – such as how space may have guided or hindered visual access or how these very visible images were handled after the Reformation – has been outside the scope of this article.

The visual culture dealt with here consists of images to be used for personal as well as collective devotion. As many of the devotional practices mentioned were performed in public spaces, this emphasizes that these devotional practices were not private in the modern sense and that the term personal is more appropriate. While evidence suggests that there was a connection between devotion and more or less private spaces such as the bedchamber or the garden, they were a reality only in the upper part of society and in certain monastic settings.[87] On the other hand, people were never entirely alone – not even in those particular settings – since the world view of that time was crowded with saints who kept people company and helped and protected them.

Unlike the devotional images which may have been used in an interior domestic setting or an enclosed garden, the images discussed here were connected to the churchyard and church exterior as well as squares and streets close to facades with images. This would indicate that in the urban context different spaces were clear focal points for devotional practices. The same could be said for the rural landscape, but there is also evidence for devotional practices connected to roads and watery contexts, indicating a landscape rich in religious meaning. Altogether images in these different settings were highly accessible both through their visibility in the townscape or landscape and because they were in public spaces and therefore available for everyone to use, regardless of their social status, gender or age. At the same time, as outdoor images their accessibility would have varied due to weather conditions in

different seasons, and differences in light due to the time of day.

Many images were placed in liminal zones of the church building such as in the lichgate, in the churchyard, on the exterior facade and in the porch. An interesting avenue to explore would have been the use of devotional imagery on the liminal zones of the city, such as the city gates. However, in the Swedish materials few city gates have been preserved apart from the Visby ringmur, where no images have been preserved.

The same applies to images on the facade of secular houses; they are placed in the liminal zone between the public area outside the building and the private interior sphere of the house. This made them highly accessible to people. Images on buildings might have been regarded as giving blessings, protection and help for the building itself, its clergy, friars or inhabitants. But the images might also have been looked upon as giving blessings, protection and help to the people in front of them who could seek their eye contact, to those who gazed upon the images from the outside of the building. What we see here is a double direction of blessing, protection and help that emerges from the images and the saints that they represent.

We have also seen that both prominent members of the nobility and clergy and the burghers themselves provided devotional images for use in urban public spaces such as the churchyard, squares and streets near secular buildings and at the gallows. The nobility was probably motivated by the idea of being an exemplar for others, and this idea may indeed have "trickled down" to the burghers. However, it may also be important to consider differences between these two groups in the relationship to the place itself. While Sten Sture and Kristina Nilsdotter certainly seem to have had a strong connection to the town of Västerås, we should perhaps see their relationship to the town as fundamentally different from that of the burghers. As a group, the burghers would have participated in the guilds and fraternities, gone to Mass in the town churches and chapels, participated in processions, raised their children in the Christian faith, received the different sacraments and buried their dead. Through this and their involvement in trading and keeping shops for craftsmanship they would have been more deeply enmeshed in the daily life and everyday religion of the town.

If we look at the images from the perspective of the users, the aims in utilizing them were multiple. Some might have been pilgrims who traveled to certain places such as cathedrals or monasteries and met and interacted with these images on their way to or at their goal of pilgrimage. They might have seen and visually interacted with the images at larger feast days, sometimes in relation with processions and other forms of liturgical expressions. In that sense the images related to the mobility of people. Perhaps some of them used the images as instruments for penitence, as we have touched upon above. The fact that some images or motifs were particularly related to an amount of indulgence made them perhaps more attractive for people to act with verbally and/or bodily in specific situations of devotion. Travelers to and through the town and those living at the place where the images were situated could of course interact with and use the images on a more everyday basis. In those cases, the images might have been an expression of the simplicity and small-scale character of prayer and devotion.

Seeing the use of images outdoors as a meaningful act related to medieval devotional practices, opens up new avenues for research. In the outdoor setting the relationship between image and space is complex, as many different

aspects of space can be activated in relation to the image. Sight lines would have influenced the visual availability in both the urban and rural environments, as well as patterns of movement. Liminality is another factor here. It is also worth noting that many of the spaces considered here were part of everyday life in both the urban and the rural context. In closing, the article has underscored both the sometimes varied nature of medieval devotional spaces and the need to see medieval personal devotion as sometimes very publicly practiced.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This article is based on the research project Helgon att hålla i handen, funded by the Berit Wallenberg Foundation, Sweden [grant number BWS 2014.0108].

Notes

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73. Fredriksson Adman, 2006, pp. 118–119.
74. Magister Matthias, *Copia Exemplorum. Herausgegeben von Lars Wållin, mit Einleitung und Indizes von Margarete Andersson-Schmitt*, Institutionen för klassiska språk, 1990, p. 110.
75. For this motif in the churches of Roslagsbro, Rö and Yttergran, Uppland, see Åke Nisbeth, "En legend av Caesarius av Heisterbach illustrerad i svenska kalkmålningar", in *Fornvännen* 1953, pp. 307–314; Oloph Odenius, "De tacksamma döda. Ett ikonografiskt och legendhistoriskt bidrag", in *Arv* 1954, pp. 97–108.

There is also one example in Biskopskulla church, Uppland, not mentioned by these authors.

76. For biographies of Sten Sture the younger and Kristina Nilsdotter (Gyllenstierna), see Bo Eriksson, *Sturarna. makten, morden, missdåden*, Norstedts, 2017; Lars Ericson Wolke, *Sten Sture den yngre. En biografi*, Historiska media, 2023.

77. See also Allan Ellenius, "Den solomstrålade Maria och passionsmeditationen. Kring några bilder från senmedeltidens Västerås", in *Västmanlands fornminnesförening, Årsskrift* 50, Västmanlands fornminnesförening, 1977, pp. 5, 15.

78. Gunnar T. Westin, "Nils Sture"; "Svante Nilsson (Sture)"; "Sten Sture d.y.," *Svenskt Biografiskt Lexikon* 34, pp. 91–102.

79. Eriksson, 2017, pp. 175–179; Ericson Wolke, 2023.

80. See also Ellenius, 1977, pp. 5, 15.

81. Dahlbäck, 1995, pp. 83–93. The Stockholm tax records refer to Old Swedish *skinnare*, but *buntmakare* and *skinnare* seem to have been used in parallel in the early sixteenth century.

82. Gottfrid Carlsson, *Jungfru Marie psaltares brödraskap i Sverige. En studie i senmedeltida fromhetsliv och gillesväsen*, Uppsala, 1948; Birgitta Fritz, "Helgeandshuset, jungfru Marie psaltares brödraskap och övriga gillen", in *600 år i Vadstena. Vadstenas historia från äldsta tider till år 2000*, eds. Gunnar Lindqvist and Göran Söderström, Stockholmia, 2000, pp. 168–175.

83. For the biography of Jörgen Kock, see Lennart Tomner, "Borgmästare Jörgen Kock", *Elbogen* 9:4, Malmö, 1979, pp. 43–65.

84. Magnus Nyman, "Tiggarordnarnas fördrivande från Norden", in *Doften av rykande vekar. Reformationen ur folkets perspektiv*, eds. Fredrik Heiding and Magnus Nyman, Artos, 2016, pp. 189–226, at 213.

85. See e.g. the opinion of the Swedish reformers, Sven-Erik Brodd, "Mariafromhet och mariologi under svensk reformationstid", in *Maria i Sverige under tusen år. Föredrag vid symposiet i Vadstena 6–10 oktober 1994*, eds. Sven-Erik Brodd and Alf Härdelin, Artos, 1996, pp. 619–646.

86. See e.g. Zachrisson, 2017.

87. Diana Webb, *Privacy and Solitude in the Middle Ages*, Hambledon Continuum, 2007.

Summary

As the article makes evident, in the late Middle Ages, space for devotion was not solely connected to the interior of the church or home but also to everyday settings in the urban and rural landscape. Crosses and devotional images of different kinds were placed outside the cathedral or rural parish church, in the graveyard, on the facades of secular houses, in the woods, at the wayside or on the beach. One question at center of the article is why devotional images were placed outside the church building, in rural and urban landscapes, what that possibly meant to people and how we may understand the function and meaning of these images. The article shows how different actors such as visiting pilgrims, visitors of the town or country side, nobility, burghers and peasants viewed or gazed upon images and how they responded to them through prayers and bodily gestures and positions. The article also shows how these highly visible and accessible public images were regarded as giving blessings, protection and help and through that contributed to people's devotional life in their own everyday living and working environment.

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