

MATEUSZ KAPUSTKA – UNIVERSITÄT ZÜRICH

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## Migrating Art Historians on the Sacred Ways

Masaryk University, Brno and Viella, Rome, 2018, 468 pp., 200 b & w and colour ils., indexes

Historians of art are, so to say, professional travellers. In their research, they move pensively from one image, object, or place to another. Moreover, they wander within pictorial representations themselves, so that they can excavate their deep multilayered iconological grounds and discursive cavities. Especially in a time of climatic catastrophe and pandemic crisis it becomes visible to what extent this kind of art historical practice of imagination is an intellectual privilege, as real journeys which usually allow the necessary exploration of objects and spaces *in situ* turn into a high-risk matter of conscience. In this context, reading the volume *Migrating Art Historians on the Sacred Ways* seems to be an appealing antidote.

The book, thoroughly edited and well-illustrated, is the outcome of a research project initiated at the Centre for Early Medieval Studies of the Masaryk University in Brno: it reports on a four-month excursion organized in 2017 by a group of eleven scholars and students in art history in order to follow in person the paths of the medieval pilgrims. The route, more than 1500 kilometres long, began in Lausanne and led the group to the Romanesque churches of France, *via*, among others, Conques, Nevers, and Saint-Benoit-sur-Loire, with Mont-Saint-Michel as the last station. The structuring of the volume, consisting of 28 essays in six chapters written by the project members and several invited authors, reflects the declared main goal of the project: an examination of the sacred sites and the cultural landscape in which they are embedded through the prism of the participants' physical experience of a long-distance walk. This performative objective is revealed in the focus set on approaching the targeted sites through a variety of intermediary phenomena: the changing perspectives on the sacred landscape during the pilgrimage, as exemplified among others by the cases of Mont-Saint-Michel, rising so spectacularly on the horizon, and the rocky Le Puy-en-Velay (ch. I); the liminal zones of church buildings, such as portals or bronze doors (ch. II); the moments of entrance into the church interior and, subsequently, into the 'deep' interior of its crypt, as exemplified by Notre-Dame-du-Port in Clermont-Ferrand

(ch. III); the multilaterality of personal encounters with material relics and their staging, pictured here with the most prominent case of Sainte-Foy in Conques (ch. IV); and, eventually, the ambiguity of topographical distances and the cultural geography of European stopovers on the way to Jerusalem: Venice as well as the Dalmatian, Albanian, and Greek coasts (ch. V). The book concludes with a personal account on the project which resumes the idea of a travelling scholarly community (ch. VI).

The phenomenological dimension of pilgrimage seen as series of graded personal encounters with the 'sacred' is reflected in the way the analysed objects and places are deprived of their usual centrality. As embedded in the realm of the beholder's bodily sensations, they are presented from the perspective of an individual moving subject who trespasses diverse interdependent liminal zones. For instance, the Romanesque tympana, like those in Beaulieu-sur-Dordogne, the authors describe in relation to the side benches situated in the portals. These benches, usually rather neglected by current scholarship, enabled the pilgrims to focus steadily on monumental depictions after their journey, in the interval between arrival and entrance (p. 46–48). Accordingly, the synaesthetic effects are also of some interest for the project: the sound of the bronze doors, the staged phenomenality of their opening and closing, the possibility of knocking and biting (i.a. p. 153–154) and, eventually, the impact of the low temperature in the crypt as a criterion for the pilgrim's attention (p. 44, 208). However, the largest portion of the volume reflects the element of visibility and spatial accessibility and it is worth noting other compelling conclusions like those on the relevance of images perceptible at the back of the previously seen object during the pilgrim's return route (this holds e.g. for the three-sided capitals in ambulatories). At last, the editors' direct avowal of what is called the 'sensual turn' present in medieval studies since the 1990s is made clear with the way the members of the group, while discussing and pointing to the objects, are included in the photographs together with the objects themselves shown in a non-central and twisted perspective.

The question that naturally arises is to what extent the scholar's personal immersion can become a measure for scientific judgement. By striving for the imitative bodily experience of a medieval pilgrim through walking between the visited sites and then following the rhythm of the prayer of the monks and nuns (p. 29), the project has laid claims for the authenticity of perception as provided mostly by one's own sensual involvement. This is asserted by Ivan Foletti in his introductory essay: *'To recapitulate, biological reactions have, now as in the past, explicit effects on the perception of artistic monuments: fatigue, endorphins, and the extended walk influence the vision and sensing of the medieval monument.'* (p. 48) One has to agree, they certainly do, but — and that is the crucial problem — one should be also aware of the fact that the perception of precisely those very biological, rudimentarily corporeal factors as well as their personalization and narrativization has changed diametrically between the years of the medieval pilgrimage and the year 2017. In other words, the body undergoes through history a perpetual discursive valuation. Therefore, it would be much more suitable to treat it as a matter of interchangeable concepts and projecting perceptions instead of putting the corporeal experience in the role of a readily available anthropological constant.<sup>1</sup> The medieval body was not a stable paradigm, but, to the contrary, a fluid screen of various pictorial and narrative modes of inscription, concealment, revelation, and disavowal.<sup>2</sup> Its 'biological' purification in terms of a practical *tabula rasa*, an imprintable surface exposed to emphatic personal encounters like those with Sainte-Foy in Conques (p. 295–315), seems to ignore, for instance, one of the most comprehensive aspects of the medieval discourse of the body: the 'contempt of the world' (*contemptus mundi*). Taking into account the relevance of theologically and moralistically motivated medieval disdain for one's own earthly corporeality, we may also see the depictions upon the portal benches like the famous *Luxuria* in Moissac (1115–1130), or the scenes of Christ's temptation in Beaulieu-sur-Dordogne (1130–1140). in a very specific light. Positioned not only between 'Good' and 'Evil', but also, if not primarily, between seductive lure and eschatological condemnation, these images were pre-programmed mirror-like representations of one's own fatal embedding in sinful corporeality. They caught the pilgrims' attention just before they entered the church through its main entrance under the central scenario of final divine jurisdiction (cf. p. 114–116). Should not we then also understand the alleged flow of endorphins as a priori subdued to such discursive premises? In any case, the encounters with the 'sacred', however immersive they might have been, certainly made an existential distance clear, as the pilgrim's (own) despised body was confronted with relics as the physical remains of the *corpora* of those who were supposed to have effectively transcended the ephemeral earthly realm. The medieval experience of the body is that overwhelmingly marked by the quest for anti-corporeal liberation.

Moreover, reading the Romanesque portal iconography through bodily immersion which shall, at least according to authors, help us understand the pilgrim's acknowledgement of the '*presence of the sacred*' intensified by his or her physical state after a long walk (p. 48) is based on similar purifying premises. One could, again, easily oppose this assumption by saying that it is exactly about the difference of non-corporeality as the target state. Archetypical for the state are the blessed who appear in the scene of the Last Judgement to Christ's right, dressed in light veils of eternal sanctity. How can one interpret the traces of the pilgrim's own fatigue — dirt, sweat, and endorphins — if he/she needs to match them so unequivocally with the iconography of ultimate transgression beyond the corporeal? Along with this concealment of discursive complexities, the notion of 'presence' remains an axiomatic, unexplained value in the volume. Like the term 'real presence' taken from liturgical exegesis, which is so often deliberately and even in an inflationary way used in recent scholarship as a 'useful key' as soon as it comes to the rhetorical moment when one needs to somehow overtop the 'representation', also 'presence' is used by the authors of the volume as an *a priori* category: *'Activated by the candlelight, the reliquary becomes to the pilgrim's eyes a living presence.'* (p. 44); *'In the presence of her reliquary-statue, pilgrims from near and far who came to venerate her experience an intimate and individual encounter with the saint depicted'* (p. 312); i.e. with candles burning, in a flickering light, there appears a '*living and intense gaze*' of a person magically hidden in the statue of Sainte-Foy (p. 312–315); *'With the help of their psycho-physical state, during the nights of incubatio, the image would thus become a presence'* (p. 315); *'representing the real presence of the incarnated word of God'* (p. 325).<sup>3</sup>

Since art history operates beyond the realm of the 'holy presence' itself and is able to judge only upon its pictorial and performative simulations, it would be advisable to examine in this context i.a. those images which the pilgrims intended to see and had in mind already before the 'verifying' entry into the sacred treasury. For this critical task, Hans Belting's comprehensive idea of the *anthropology of images* could be a very helpful instrument. Surprisingly, it was not even included in the volume's bibliography.<sup>4</sup> A related consideration on the complexity of mental pre-conditionings and gradual transformations of particular images in regard to the *body as media* put to its limits would have helped the editors and the authors of the book to avoid oversimplifying immersive impressions which actually incapacitate the multilayered subjectivity of the medieval beholder.<sup>5</sup> In any case, for the purpose of an investigation into the criteria of historical authenticity, agency, and survival we would need in medieval research a productive dialectical anachronism as a contemporary instrument of discursive differentiation instead of pleas for the valence of reconstructive mimetism configured upon alleged anthropological constants. The Middle Ages are today an alien, foreign domain, although they are part

of our own legacy. While reflecting on this, we should also be conscious of how diverse one-sided anthropologies have already in the past entangled themselves in the dubious search for the postulated intrinsic 'authenticity' of 'distant cultures'.

As a matter of fact, the volume *Migrating Art Historians*, situated on the narrative span between fact-oriented historiography and an attempt at its performative verification by means of repetition, is almost entirely devoid both of critical discourse analysis and theoretical background. The reader will not find any substantiated references to related theories or concepts of space, body, or, most basically, those configuring the outlines of pictorial embodiment and re-embodiment.<sup>6</sup> In this way, the scholarly group seems to have accomplished its premise formulated in their video trailer: 'Our aim is to change the way the university is understood. To provide authentic experience instead of an institution based solely on theories.'<sup>7</sup> In their eyes, a 'pilgrimage' shall thus deliver a remedy for the 'ivory tower' (p. 53). However, this statement — definitely over-sharpened — unequivocally suggests that the intellectual experience of theory is primarily deprived of authenticity. It also neglects the fact that every experience is preconditioned by explicit and implicit frameworks which both set up the limitations of participatory practice and allow to transcend them. Moreover, we can say that this premise clearly holds the danger that the relation between theory and practice with its many manifolds would be turned into an exclusivist alternative. At least, this view presupposes a certain 'guilt' of the university in being a biased actor involved in this apparent detachment from the authenticity of scientific procedures.

Last but not least, the very title of the book can be described as highly problematic. The choice of 'migration' as a term to encompass the activity of the project's participants has been left without any further explanation in the volume. Travelling is, however, not necessarily a migration, just as a journey is not necessarily a pilgrimage. As sociologist and philosopher Zygmunt Bauman examined the complex dimensions of mobility in the liquid, disintegrated postmodern societies, he opposed Max Weber's teleological vision of modernity as a continuous target-oriented pilgrimage. Bauman accordingly distinguished between the categories of *stroller* (or *flâneur*, after Benjamin), *vagrant*, *tourist*, and *player* and referred also to their large metaphorical outskirts as well as historical aftermaths.<sup>8</sup> One would be able to locate a scholarly simulation in the form of a journey commonly undertaken today for the sake of occasional historical immersion into the realm of a distant medieval pilgrimage somewhere in the intersection of those four. But, most of all, it is the tragic context of long-lasting expulsions — past and contemporary, concerning both endangered populations and, even more specifically, oppressed art historians forced into exile — that makes the term *migration* in the volume questionable and misleading, no matter how trendy it may seem. The reason for this reservation lies,

nonetheless, beyond conspicuously moralizing terms: it is rather about the conviction that particularly in the time of semantic dilution in current political debates and media devoted to the matter of *migration* it should be the role of the humanities to untiringly sensitize the public towards historical complexity and fragility of this notion.

Given the critical remarks above, I must assert that my review should by no means be understood as an overall denial of the scholarly project described in the volume. Nowadays, as digital media and internet publications accompanied by virtual networking and online teaching become automated scholarly routine and thus threaten to impoverish the relevance of locality, so meaningful for the unconditional status of the university and its *event* (*Ereignis*) of diagnostic thinking as once postulated by Jacques Derrida,<sup>9</sup> we need to substantiate the specific proven community-building measures of our discipline. Despite the declarations given by the team of *Migrating Art Historians*, however, it is not about any revolutionary change, but, rather about a self-confident return to obvious essentials of art historical practice. A common multisensory experience with historical art *in situ* is therefore a positive and desirable element. We could subsume this issue again regarding the very reality of our professional travels: Art history has always been an (*ad*)venture.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Ivan Foletti's introductory claim: 'The aim of our venture was in no way meant to reconstruct mimetically the experience of the medieval pilgrim' (p. 31) is followed by similar declarations throughout the volume (cf. i.a. p. 39, 410), but the list of obstacles which prevent the full reconstruction is limited here to differences in particular routes, transformed landscape, technology, pilgrims' clothing, etc.

<sup>2</sup> Beside such topics as fluid and gendered corporeality raised in medieval studies by Caroline Walker Bynum already in the 1980s, see i.a. the particularly evident case of Francis' stigmata as elements of projection, inscription, imitation, imprint, or seal: Hans Belting, 'Franziskus. Der Körper als Bild', in *Bild und Körper im Mittelalter*, ed. Kristin Marek, Raphaële Preisinger, Marius Rimmel, and Katrin Kärcher, Paderborn 2006, pp. 21–36. — Chiara Frugoni, *Francesco e l'invenzione delle stimmate. Una storia per parole e immagini fino a Bonaventura e Giotto*, Torino 1993. Such diversification would help to perceive, for example, the Three Magi—seekers approaching the 'sacred', so often depicted in 'pilgrimage churches', and known to the pilgrims from theatre plays like *Officium stellae* (pp. 131–133, 183–184, 236, 317–332) — as mirroring figurations of attracted beholders.

<sup>3</sup> The *locus classicus* of the medieval studies: the account of the cult of Sainte-Foy given by Bernard of Angers in *Liber miraculorum Sancte Fidis* which delivers insights into medieval rhetorics, image politics, and the cathartic dimension of conversion, is discussed extensively here. However, this is done again in terms of a guiding 'theory of images', see pp. 298–312.

<sup>4</sup> Hans Belting, *An Anthropology of Images: Picture, Medium, Body*, Princeton 2014.

5 The anthropology of images would have certainly been a suitable systematic reference for scarce indications appearing throughout the volume, like: 'Before the encounter, the contemporary pilgrim has time to imagine, to re-imagine, and to imagine again. Once the monument has been seen and touched, the experience is reworked by the memory that follows it' (p. 39); 'Drawing the pilgrim in must ..) be one of the fundamental intentions of the patron.' — '... decorations become the visual projection (and for the pilgrim also the mental projection) of the content concealed behind the walls.' (p. 42); 'Recognizing images that appear to the pilgrim to be similar, without language and cultural barriers encountered along the way, thus becomes for the pilgrim a form of reassurance.' (p. 44); 'The origin and culmination of the pilgrim's expectations was to make contact with the holy' — 'shrines as embodiments of enlivened and sacred space' (p. 281).

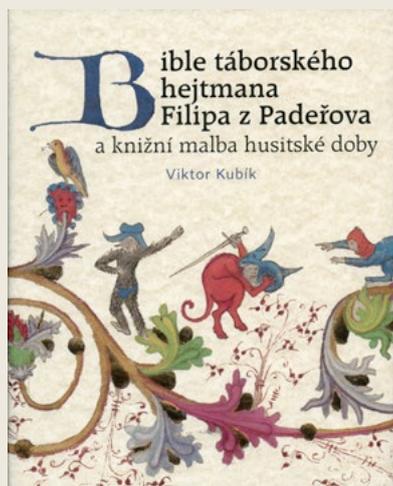
6 Apart from the initial passage on the processuality of landscape (pp. 65–69), topic-related theories are quoted in the book only as solitaire keywords without any advanced contextualization, like i.a. Maurice Merleau-Ponty's 'je suis mon corps' (p. 399), Alexei Lidov's hierotopy (p. 213–214, cf. p. 417), or Hans Belting's preliminary term of iconic presence (p. 48, 311–312). The interesting impulse given by Michele Bacci in his two-pages essay with the final remark on *topomimetic*

positioning of particular localities on pilgrims' routes (p. 378) also remains without any further considerations. Finally, in order to describe pilgrimage as intensity of personal transformation, Jana Horáková shortly refers to *A Thousand Plateaus* (p. 23). Ironically enough, in their introductory passage, Deleuze and Guattari, in the course of their critique of Freud, discuss the notion of *intensity* in the context of philosophical schizoanalysis and in regard to their pluralistic construct of unorganized, unilateral *corps sans organes*. And this, in fact, as rooted in Spinoza's lessons of substance and immanence, remains in the very opposition to what the project's initiators define as bodily sensation which shall provide one's own personal experience of veracity or authenticity in front of images as a phenomenological condition of 'becoming a pilgrim'.

7 Migrating Art Historians, project trailer <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NEMbfoVosgo>, 4. 12. 2020, Cf. p. 412–414.

8 Zygmunt Bauman, *Life in Fragments: Essays in Postmodern Morality*, Oxford 1995, ch. 3. Cf. also idem, *Postmodernity and Its Discontents*, Cambridge 1997, ch. 6.

9 Jacques Derrida, *L'Université sans condition*, Paris 2001, these I.



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## Bible tábořského hejtmana Filipa z Padeřova a knižní malba husitské doby

Praha, NLN 2018, 263 s., 53 čb. obr., 34 bar. obr., rejstřík citovaných rukopisů, angl. a něm. resumé

Nestává se často, že se v krátkém rozmezí necelých dvou let objeví hned tři publikace k jedné středověké památce, které navíc reprezentují tři naprosto odlišné způsoby uvažování. Rovněž podoba, v jaké se ony tři publikace objevily, vypovídá o rozmanitosti forem odborné reflexe, jíž se danému předmětu dostalo. Jejich průsečíkem je kodex Rakouské národní knihovny č. 1175, zhotovený mezi 1431/32 a 1435 a nazývaný zvykově Padeřovskou biblí podle jejího objednavatele, tábořského hejtmana Filipa z Padeřova.<sup>1</sup> Vedle zde recenzované knihy Viktora Kubíka, to byl náš vlastní text pro sborník Mileny Bartlové *MBLX. Pro Milenu Bartlovou*, zaměřený na ikonografii a kontextuální čtení dvou z výzdoby vybočujících iluminací kodexu,<sup>2</sup> a konečně rozsáhlá recenze Kubíkovy knihy od Františka Šmahela, který se k Padeřovské biblí i k posuzované publikaci postavil jako historik.<sup>3</sup>

V prvé řadě je tedy Kubíkovou nespornou zásluhou, že kolem rukopisu v současnosti vzniká aktivní odborná debata.<sup>4</sup> Od toho se bude odvíjet i náš postup při zpracování recenze, jejíž běžný formát se snažíme vědomě překročit — rozhodně nebude našim cílem převyprávět obsah Kubíkovy publikace, ani srovnávat s dalšími pracemi nebo Kubíkův přístup za každou cenu kritizovat. Spíše se pokusíme poukázat na některé otázky, které Bible Filipa z Padeřova na badatele klade a které Kubík ve své monografii neřešil, i přestože si v úvodu pokládá mnoho otázek (s. 8), rozhodně více, než byl nakonec schopen zodpovědět. Především, že na rozdíl od autora recenzované knihy, který dílo podrobil především důkladnému formálnímu rozboru, považujeme za důležité pojmut rukopis v daleko širším kontextu. Chceme tak upozornit na některé detaily a kontexty, které jsou