

Quantitative image analysis: the Painter of wooden shoes

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Introduction

The preceding two decades have witnessed a fundamental change in historians' access to new source material.¹ The digital revolution has created facilities for storing huge amounts of images, the results of which we have now begun to see. Images constitute a growing part of the material for research—and presentation too—deployed by medievalists.² The digital revolution may result in a paradigmatic change in our understanding of the Middle Ages and in the presentation of our research. Working with images—qualitatively and quantitatively—we need to establish new methods of analysis and interpretation.

Art history is a discipline that concentrates on images, but art historical research traditionally has excluded many different kinds of imagery from its field of operation. Art historians are facing an expansion of their research material as well as the necessity for a new methodology to take over from that of the Warburg School. Late in his life Erwin Panofsky gave up the term *iconology* and Irvin Lavin confessed that sometimes he thought iconography was an invention of the devil.³ These two statements form a good starting point for art historians to

¹ François Garnier, *L'âne à la lyre. Sotisier d'iconographie médiévale* (Paris: Le Léopard d'Or, 1988), p. 27.

² Gerhard Jaritz, 'Images. A Primer of Computer-Supported Analysis with Kleio IAS', *Halbgraue Reihe zur historischen Fachinformatik*, 22 (1993), pp. 11–14.

³ Irving Lavin, 'Iconography as a Humanistic Discipline', in *Iconography at the Crossroads*, ed. by Brendan Cassidy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993),

elaborate on a new methodology, and within the preceding decades we have witnessed an intense and fruitful discussion concerning new approaches to images and new definitions of what is art.⁴

Historical methods are firmly based on working with texts and the whole apparatus for research has been based on and around the written word. At the time when Nieburg, Ranke, Seignobos, and their followers elaborated on a scientific historical methodology, images could be reproduced only in black and white copies as woodcuts or engravings.⁵ In a way, pictorial source material did not exist for the fathers of the historical sciences, or, if it did, then only to a limited extent. ‘Following the recovery in the fifteenth century of so much ancient literature, written records came to monopolize the sources on which they drew’.⁶ Consequently they turned towards philology. In a sense, they represent the same attitude towards images expressed by Gregory the Great and the many erudite medieval scholars who thought—or at least wrote—that images are the Bible of the illiterate. So why use visual source material when you are able to read a text?⁷ Until the present, historians have hesitated to fashion new methods that deal with pictures.⁸ Of course we shall not completely give up the terms: Tradition/Überreste or Document/Monument, but the binding of history to philology was invented by the devil. In the years to come he will be defeated.⁹

Easy access to thousands of images changes the way research can take place and, consequently, also the contents of that research. One hundred years ago, access to images required travel. Art could be experienced almost exclusively in

pp. 33, 38.

⁴ The list of contributions from Baschet and Baxandall to Warnke and Wirth is impressive. As a matter of fact there is a need for a bibliography on this subject matter.

⁵ William M. Ivins, Jr., *Prints and Visual Communication* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1978).

⁶ Francis Haskell, *History and its Images. Art and the Interpretation of the Past* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 2.

⁷ The Danish founder of a scientific historical methodology, Kristian Erslev, published in 1911 a book *Historisk Teknik*, which is still in use at the universities. In the book he only once refers to an image, namely the depiction of green horses on the Bayeux tapestry. He states that we do not believe that horses were green in the eleventh century! Concerning the lack of a methodology among Danish historians towards visual material see Axel Bolvig, ‘Med passende ændringer’, in *Sølv og salte*, ed. by Tove Hansen (Copenhagen: Rhodos, 1990), pp. 225–37.

⁸ Rainer Wohlfeil, ‘Methodische Reflexionen zur Historischen Bildkunde’, in *Zeitschrift für Historische Forschung*, Beiheft 12 (1991), pp. 17–35.

⁹ Concerning the relationship between history and art history see Jérôme Baschet, ‘Les images: des objets pour l’historien?’, in *Le Moyen Age aujourd’hui. Actes de la rencontre de Cerisy-la-Salle*, ed. by J. Le Goff and G. Lobrichon, Cahiers du Léopard d’Or, 7 (Paris: Le Léopard d’Or, 1997), pp. 101–35.

museums and churches, particularly cathedrals. The museums and a number of the cathedrals were situated in the most important cultural centres of Europe. The subjects of research were therefore centralized and reflected the purchasing policy of the great museums. Very often, art-historical research was concentrated on rather small numbers of subjects, which were defined as Fine Art. Historians very seldom visited museums in order to research.

The experiences of the visitors to museums and cathedrals were only fixed on their retinas. Many art historians of the nineteenth century developed an outstanding visual mnemonics, but still it was an unstable means of storing visual information. From that personal image-store, art historians might retrieve many examples with forms and contents from artworks experienced years ago pertinent to the subjects of their current investigations. Checking and modifying hypothetical connections required another trip to museums and cathedrals perhaps far away from the subject of investigation. The result was often arbitrary and naturally dependent on the museums and cathedrals actually visited by the investigator.¹⁰

Later, the situation was improved by a growing number of illustrations in printed editions. The available visual material began to grow and is still growing. For a long time, it was still a matter of access to relevant printed material and of what material has or has not been actually printed. A subject that was made the object of massive printed reproduction tended to become a centripetal force for explanation of artistic imitation and influence. Theories of artistic influence and migration of style grew dependent on what was printed and accessible. During recent decades, the visual history of the past is most often the history of slides and reproductions.¹¹

Today, the accessibility of visual material is growing rapidly. The establishment of huge image databases is an expanding undertaking in numerous institutions. The computer revolution has embraced the visual side of the past. In the future, art history will have to expand its field of research to new kinds of images, and historians will be forced to include images as a vital source material. The accessibility of images will turn history and art history upside down. Today, you can write about medieval art in one volume, but you still can print only a very limited selection of the works of art. In future, you will—in principle—be able to gather pictures of all the medieval artefacts you like on huge hard disks and browse through thousands of images. But nobody will have the energy and

¹⁰ Regarding connoisseurship, see Jaynie Anderson, *Collecting Connoisseurship and the Art Market in Risorgimento Italy. Giovanni Morelli's Letters to Giovanni Melli and Pietro Zavaritt (1866–1872)* (Venice: Instituto veneto di scienze, lettere ed arti, 1999) [Dr. Phillip Lindley has kindly drawn my attention to this book].

¹¹ Charles S. Rhyne, 'Computer Images for Research, Teaching and Publication in Art History and Related Disciplines,' *Visual Resources* 12 (1996), pp. 19–51 (p. 25).

time to read about this enormous body of images.¹²

The rapid diffusion of the Internet is facilitating easy access to widespread visual source material.¹³ Among other things, the Internet will erode traditional nation-bound research and presentation. The construction of the Internet rests on a kind of equality among the thousands of individual websites and, consequently, also among the growing number of image databases.¹⁴ There is no centre on the Net and therefore no periphery. Looking for similarities between pictures or eventual models of your object of investigation will take you in many directions and not to a specific centre for artistic creativity and innovation. Centre-periphery theories are homeless in cyberspace. They are replaced by intercultural and interactive structures that cannot avoid influencing our medieval studies. The question of individual authorship will become less important.¹⁵ In conjunction with a growth of research in visual history we shall witness a corresponding growth of interdisciplinary research that will not work within and accept today's national frontiers.

The computer revolution involves new ways of defining an image. An image manifests itself in or is presented by means of physical material. This implies that it has a physical demarcation in proportion to something that is not a picture. The cropping or the frame sets the limit. Of course a painting can hold several individual subordinate motifs but the frame sets a limit to the contents and the extent of the visual message. With the invention of photography, cropping has had a growing importance to the definition of an image.¹⁶ This development has reached its peak with the digitalization process. Cut-and-paste functions are indispensable tools when working with computer-supported research in pictures.¹⁷ By these means we, as users, create our own images, and each of us produces an individual verbal definition and description. The process of transcribing visual information to a linguistic system is twofold. It is based on conventions—that is, iconography in a broad definition—and it is based on

¹² Axel Bolvig, 'Ars longa—vita brevis', *Medium aevum quotidianum* 39 (1998), pp. 9–20 (15).

¹³ Rhyne (as in note 11).

¹⁴ A collection of more than five hundred links to web-sites with medieval images is to be found on www.kalkmalerier.dk/links.

¹⁵ Cf. Ivan Gaskell, 'History of Images', in *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, ed. by Peter Burke (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), pp. 168–92.

¹⁶ Harold Evans, *Pictures on a Page* (London: William Heinemann, 1978), pp. 203–36.

¹⁷ Charles S. Rhyne, 'Images as Evidence in Art History and Related Disciplines', in *Museums and the Web*, ed. by David Bearman and Jennifer Trant (Pittsburgh: Archives & Museum Informatics, 1997), pp. 347–61.

analogy, which also itself is based on coded systems that by analogy refer to an outside world. Having no grammar or linearity, an image is an open system that cannot by itself present a precise amount of information.¹⁸ Consequently, each scanning and, even more, each cutting-out of details requires new definitions that can vary ad infinitum. Defining or indexing these new digital images is a huge problem in the establishment of image bases but contrariwise also gives the researcher new opportunities to create relevant source material and to bring together visual information from a variety of pictures.

The definition of an image, then, is bound to its framing and/or cropping and cutting.¹⁹ With wall paintings, the problem is that there is no material frame in a traditional sense. An oil painting has a frame, which does not belong to the image. A wall painting needs no frame, as the material of which it consists is the same as the surrounding walls.²⁰ Consequently the building itself, the architecture, constitutes the frame, within which many individual iconographic or analogue motifs can be traced. When dealing with wall paintings, you always make a selection based not on framed subjects but on iconographic definitions or the recurrence of motifs, be it the Crucifixion, Saint Laurence, the heavenly Castle, or a wooden shoe. The selected subject may receive a new 'identity', but it still belongs to the totality of the architectural interior.²¹

The above-mentioned considerations will, in the following section, be exemplified by the inclusion of the image base with Danish wall paintings, which is accessible on the Internet on www.kalkmalerier.dk/.²²

Danish Wall Paintings: Alternative Images

In some twenty churches situated in the district of Southeast Funen and the island of Langeland, we find vault decorations that do not fit traditional iconography or our understanding of artistic expression. It is a matter of a very strange,

¹⁸ Susanne K. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key. A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite and Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1942); Roland Barthes, 'Rhétorique de l'image', in *Communications*, 4 (1964), pp. 40–51.

¹⁹ Gerhard Jaritz, 'Comparative Analysis of Historical Image Information', in *Electronic Filing, Registration and Communication of Visual Historical Data*, ed. by Axel Bolvig (Göttingen: Max-Planck-Institut für Geschichte, 1995), pp. 29–33.

²⁰ Sometimes we find painted frames. This goes especially for pictures of St Christopher. Still the painted frame belongs to the total decoration of the church.

²¹ Axel Bolvig, 'Haec pictura completa fuit—Om kalkmalerier og rammer', in *Hikuin*, ed. by Annedorte Vad (forthcoming).

²² Jesper Jerne Borrlid, 'Medieval Danish Wall Paintings—an Internet Database', in *Medium aevum quotidianum*, 39 (as in note 12), pp. 21–36.



Fig. 1. Gudme church. Wall painting, 'wooden shoe'. 1488. © Author

perhaps ‘primitive’, and certainly alternative imagery.²³ Traditional indexing of these paintings based on conventional iconography or visual analogy is difficult. The churches were decorated during the last three decades of the fifteenth century by an artist or a workshop that has been named the Painter of Wooden Shoes (‘træskomaleren’). The name has been given because the workshop has painted one or more wooden shoes, among the peculiar imagery and ornamentation, in most of the churches (fig. 1).²⁴

The painted wooden shoes are not framed in any way, so even if they possess their own connotations they cannot be treated as if they were isolated from the rest of the decorations in the churches. They belong to an imagery consisting of strange and grotesque figures and birds, almost abstract configurations, with very few traditional religious subjects. All the configurations appear as isolated motifs, but none of them have painted frames to give them an explicitly individual existence. They belong to one ‘picture’, that is to say the whole decoration within the church. All the picture’s information must be interpreted on the level of the ‘reality’ of the image and not of the ‘reality’ of actual life.²⁵ The depicted wooden shoes must be evaluated in their context.

²³ www.kalkmalerier.dk—search: H MJ in arkivnr.

²⁴ www.kalkmalerier.dk—search: H MJ-152 (Gudme).

²⁵ Jaritz (as in note 2), p. 16.

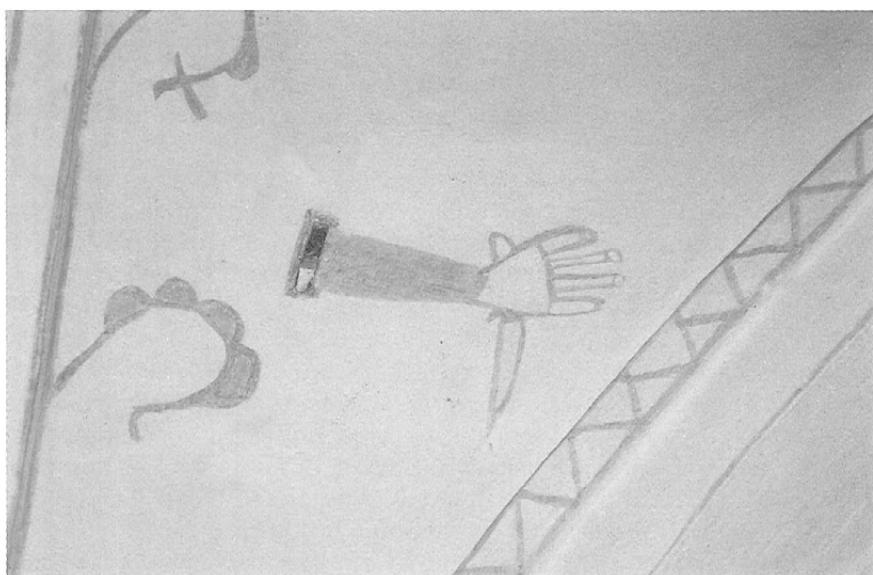


Fig. 2. Ørbæk church. Wall painting, 'hand with a knife'. 1490. © Author

In Ørbæk church the Painter of Wooden Shoes has depicted an arm stretching out of one of the built-in holes in a vault. The hand is holding a pointed knife (fig. 2).²⁶ What does that mean? What are the traditional connotations of a knife? In the long history of mankind, the knife has always been *the* murder weapon of the ordinary man. Today we talk about 'die Dolchstoss Legende', referring to the German army being stabbed in the back by the civilian population during the First World War. The Night of the Long Knives refers to Hitler's execution of many of the S. A. leadership without trial. When forced to retire in 1908, the Danish Prime Minister J. C. Christensen said that he was 'stabbed in the back'. Since 1808 the expression 'they are at daggers drawn' has meant unbridled hostility. 'Mack the Knife' is a famous scoundrel in one of the plays by Bertold Brecht. The Serbian ultra-nationalist Vuk Draskovic published in 1982 a book entitled 'The Knife', in which the knife symbolizes the Muslims, the ugly and dangerous enemy. Looking farther back in history we see that the knife always has been connected to negative and deadly conceptions. Lady Macbeth says 'Give me the daggers: the sleeping and the dead are but as pictures. . .'.²⁷ The Danish king Erik Klipping was murdered in 1286; the annals write that the

²⁶ www.kalkmalerier.dk—search: H MJ-125 (Ørbæk).

²⁷ William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, act. II, scene 1 (murder of Duncan, king of Scotland).

king's body had fifty-six wounds.²⁸ In another source we read: 'In the year 1286 king Erik, son of Christopher of pious memory, died on St Cecilia's night, caused by the knives of the impious, terribly murdered by his own men in his own bed'.²⁹ According to the written material, murderous knives belong to the impious.

In the wall paintings, too, the knife occurs as a negatively connoted tool, a tool for murdering, wounding, and cutting. The Circumcision of the child Jesus, which is the first step on his bloody story of salvation, is performed with a knife.³⁰ The executioners skin St Bartholomew with knives,³¹ and the breasts of St Catharine are cut off with knives.³² Of course the knife is the most practical tool to be used for these purposes—what else should they use?—but it hurts the victims. It is being used for torture. The fatal function of the knife can be seen in depictions of the deadly sin *Ira*—Anger. In Jørlunde church a visualization of the seven deadly sins was painted around 1510. Anger is depicted as a murderer with a knife.³³ In Fanefjord church there is a depiction of Joab stabbing Abner from behind with a knife: it is a betrayal, just as is the kiss of Judas.³⁴ In Vigersted church a juggler is playing with and throwing two pointed knives. The dress accentuating his body and the proximity of a woman performing a lascivious dance classify the juggler as the opposite of established social groupings.³⁵

In contrast, the killing performed by professional soldiers by order of the

²⁸ 'Annales Ryenses', *Danmarks middelalderlige annaler* (Selskabet for udgivelse af kilder til dansk historie, 1980), p. 175: 'Rex E[ricus] occisus est in lecto in nocte sancte Cecilie a suis, quos maxime dilexerat, inflictis sibi ulneribus DVI'.

²⁹ *Libri datici Lundenses, Lund domkapitels gavebøger* (Selskabet for udgivelse af Kilder til dansk Historie, 1973), p. 296: 'Anno incarnationis M.CC.LXXX.VI. rex Ericus, pie recordacionis Chrisofori regis quondam filius, pugionibus impiorum occubit in nocte beate Cecilie a suis in proprio lecto crudelissime trucidatus'.

³⁰ www.kalkmalerier.dk—search: sh/46, 14/139 (Tingsted).

³¹ www.kalkmalerier.dk—search: 20/72 (Tyvelse).

³² www.kalkmalerier.dk—search: 12/57 (Århus Cathedral).

³³ www.kalkmalerier.dk—search: 16/19 (Jørlunde); *Danmarks Kirker, Frederiksborg amt*, 1975, pp. 2259–60; in some woodcuts in *Pèlerinage de la vie humaine* the vice Treachery is depicted with a pointed knife in her hands: see Michael Camille, 'Reading the Printed Image', in *Printing the Written Word. The Social History of Books circa 1450–1520*, ed. by Sandra Hindman (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 259–91.

³⁴ www.kalkmalerier.dk—search: 12/19 (Fanefjord); Ulla Haastrup, 'Danske kalkmalerier 1500–1536', in *Danske kalkmalerier 1500–1536*, ed. by Ulla Haastrup (Copenhagen: Nationalmuseet, 1992), pp. 37–38.

³⁵ www.kalkmalerier.dk—search: 22/198 (Vigersted).

authorities in the Massacre of the Innocents normally is performed with swords.³⁶ And Abraham uses not a knife, of course, but a sword to sacrifice his son Isaac.³⁷ Real heroes fight each other with lances or swords, never with knives.³⁸ I need not mention that St Martin cuts his coat with a sword, even if a knife would be more useful.³⁹ And in the Agony, St Peter is armed with a sword, which he uses to cut off the ear of Malchus.⁴⁰ Of course a holy man cannot use a knife to attack a soldier, even if he might have had one in his belt.

The knife, therefore, generally has murderous connotations, and such connotations must be attached to the knife in the hand stretching out of the hole in Ørum church. This knife is not the only one depicted in the church. On a painting—now whitewashed over—could be seen a very strange person putting a pointed knife into the anus of a devil or a monster in order to tap fluids into a jug.⁴¹ In this motif the knife is used to exploit the devil or Evil itself. In Allesø church the Painter of Wooden Shoes has depicted another hand holding a knife.⁴² In Ryslinge church the same workshop presented a grossly caricatured male person equipped with knives at both his hips.⁴³ The knife depicted by the Painter of Wooden Shoes in these parish churches is loaded with dangerous, murderous and rebellious connotations. How does the negative knife correspond to the rest of the decorations?

Historians and art historians have had difficulty relating to the imagery of the Painter of Wooden Shoes. ‘For a modern viewer they are not easily understood’.⁴⁴ It makes you wonder how they ever came to be accepted as a suitable decoration in the church.⁴⁵

Grotesque masks with a fool’s cap and hands that grasp a rib or a knife might be considered as a reflection of an extremely baroque caprice which combined with images marked by dark superstition and horror gives you an insight into emotional life of the late Middle Ages seen from its most glaring sides.⁴⁶

³⁶ www.kalkmalerier.dk—search: barnemord*.

³⁷ www.kalkmalerier.dk—search: 22/27 (Glesborg).

³⁸ www.kalkmalerier.dk—search: 15/33 (Dronninglund).

³⁹ www.kalkmalerier.dk—search: 30-3/79 (Tuse).

⁴⁰ www.kalkmalerier.dk—search: Tilfangetagelse; John 18.10 writes that Peter drew his sword.

⁴¹ www.kalkmalerier.dk—search: HMJ-123 (Ørbæk).

⁴² www.kalkmalerier.dk—search: HMJ-219 (Allesø).

⁴³ www.kalkmalerier.dk—search: HMJ-32 (Ryslinge).

⁴⁴ *Danske kalkmalerier 1475–1500*, ed. by Ulla Haastrup (Copenhagen: Nationalmuseet, 1991), p. 46.

⁴⁵ Hans J. Frederiksen, ‘Troens kunst’, in *Ny dansk kunsthistorie*, vol. 1 (1999), p. 217.

⁴⁶ Egmont Lind, *Report to the National Museum*, quotation from Lise Gotfredsen, ‘Nogle sære billeder’, in *ICO*, nos 3–4 (1977), p. 20.

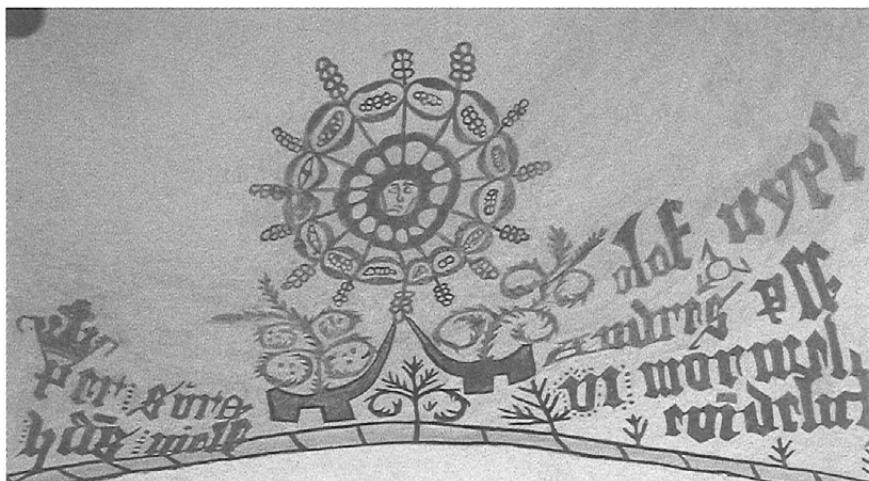


Fig. 3. Stege church. Wall painting, 'two wooden shoes'. 1494. © Author

Another scholar, Lise Godtfredsen, concludes that the painter was psychotic—maybe schizophrenic, ‘which means that we must be content with not being able in a satisfactory way to interpret his images. It also means that we no longer need to spend time researching them to find a deeper theological meaning. Their logic eludes daylight and our senses’.⁴⁷

Nevertheless, researchers have thrown themselves into interpreting the decorations of the Painter of Wooden Shoes. Ulla Haastrup writes that these primitive decorations performed by bricklayers become meaningful representations of symbols of the course of the year with its ecclesiastical festive days and secular calendar entries. She suggests that the many depicted wooden shoes, rather than being emblems, must be regarded as symbols. She asks if a wooden shoe symbolizes an artisan because workers used this special footwear.⁴⁸ Henrik M. Jansen has written a book about the Painter of Wooden Shoes, which offers a broad survey of decoration campaigns of this workshop.⁴⁹ Leif Søndergaard takes a standpoint opposite to Lise Godtfredsen’s. While she thinks that the images in Ørbæk church were painted by a psychotic person, Leif Søndergaard is convinced that they stem from the thoughts and beliefs of ordinary artisans in the countryside in the late fifteenth century. This means that they possess logic and are meaningful, but in a different way from images made by professional painters. He concludes that most such wall paintings in churches decorated by

⁴⁷ Gotfredsen (as in note 46), p. 28.

⁴⁸ *Danske kalkmalerier 1475–1500* (as in note 44), pp. 30–31.

⁴⁹ Henrik M. Jansen, *Træskomaleren—Et fynsk kalkmaleriværksted i 1400-tallet* (Svendborg: Svendborg & Omegns Museum, 1991).

the Painter of Wooden Shoes are intended to protect the vaulting against demonic forces from outside: they are apotropaic.⁵⁰ The database of Danish wall paintings offers an opportunity for quantitative comparison, and querying the database about wooden shoes provides you with another answer. In the relatively few images that depict artisans, we never find a wooden shoe worn by them.⁵¹ One might believe that peasants wore wooden shoes, but this is not the case. Peasants are depicted in the First Labour and the Legend of the Fast Growing Seed. A search of these subjects reveals no wooden shoes at all.⁵² In the Dance of Death the peasant does not wear wooden shoes.⁵³ And neither do the two hunchbacked peasants in the Dominican monastery at Århus.⁵⁴ We get the same negative result when making a query on shepherds in the database.⁵⁵ In the depiction of the Prayer of the Rich and the Poor Man, neither man is wearing wooden shoes.⁵⁶ Apparently all the above-mentioned social groups wore a kind of leather shoe; certainly not wooden shoes.⁵⁷

The wooden shoes depicted by the Painter of Wooden Shoes and the few other equivalent depictions are not designed as an ordinary foot-shaped piece of footwear. Normally they have high wedges and long pointed toes (fig. 3).⁵⁸ They

⁵⁰ Leif Søndergaard, 'En håndværkers tro og tanker—om kalkmalerierne i Ørbæk kirke', *Årbog for Svendborg & Omegns Museum* 1995 (1996), pp. 55–65; Leif Søndergaard, 'Magiske tegn, figurer og formler i senmiddelalderlige kalkmalerier', in *Billeder i middelalderen. Kalkmalerier og altertavler*, ed. by Bisgaard, Nyberg, and Søndergaard (Odense: Odense Universitetsforlag, 1999), pp. 165–216.

⁵¹ www.kalkmalerier.dk—search: 16/147 (Åstrup); 22/199 (Vigersted); sh/598 (Kirkerup); 11/90 (Tved); 15/6, 15/8, 15/9 (Sulsted); Gislinge, reproduced in Niels M. Saxtorph, *Danmarks kalkmalerier* (Copenhagen: Politikens Forlag, 1986), p. 92; Tirsted, reproduced in Axel Bolvig, *Dagligliv i middelalderen* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1979), p. 30.

⁵² www.kalkmalerier.dk—search: 20/150 (Hyllested); 12/180 (Lyngby); 14/141 (Tingsted); 14/112 (Tågerup); 30-3/62 (Tuse); 17/57 (Keldby); 14/44 (Reerslev); sh/316 (Gjerrild); 32-3/73 (Elmelunde); 17/130 (Lem).

⁵³ www.kalkmalerier.dk—search: ko136 (Nørre Alslev).

⁵⁴ www.kalkmalerier.dk—search: 11/125 (Århus Dominican monastery).

⁵⁵ www.kalkmalerier.dk—search: sh/358 (Reerslev); 30-3/53 (Tuse); 9/34 (Mørkøv).

⁵⁶ www.kalkmalerier.dk—search: fattig*.

⁵⁷ The publication of the comprehensive excavations in Svendborg, close to the territory of the Painter of Wooden Shoes, mentions a large number of leather shoes but no wooden shoes; see Willy Groenman-van Waateringe, *Leather from Medieval Svendborg* (Odense: Odense University Press, 1988). The same can be said of the huge collections of shoes at the museums of Coventry; see Susan Thomas, *Medieval Footwear from Coventry* (Coventry: Coventry Museum, 1980). Encyclopaedia Britannica informs us under the reference 'sabot' that wooden shoes are used by peasants in France and the Netherlands, www.eb.com:180/cgi-bin/g?DocF=macro/515/84.html.

⁵⁸ www.kalkmalerier.dk—search: HMJ-104 (Vindinge); HMJ-107 (Frørup); 17/67



Fig. 4. Nibe church. Wall painting, 'pig wearing pattens'. Early sixteenth century. © Author



Fig. 5. Gislev church. Wall painting, 'Crowning of Thorns', detail. c. 1520. © Author

connote the dangerousness of pointed objects exactly as does the knife.

A search in the database on wooden shoe ('træsko') reveals quite another picture of the figures using this footwear.⁵⁹ In the chapel of The Three Magi at Roskilde Cathedral, the youngest of the kings is depicted as an extremely dressy young man.⁶⁰ He has long bright hair under his hat, which looks like a crown. His dress shows off his body. The sleeves are slit up to his upper arms. In the belt a pointed dagger is placed like a phallic symbol. On his feet are long elegant wooden shoes—'pattens'—with high wedges. This type of shoe functioned as an overshoe, which raised the person further above the dirty and muddy ground. The detailing of these wooden shoes followed the fashion of leather shoes.⁶¹ It is not unusual that the youngest of the kings is sumptuously and provocatively dressed (which did not prevent guardians of morality all over Europe making sarcastic remarks about clothing that reveals the body).

Balthazar is not the only one to wear elegant pattens. Among the paintings in Nibe church we find a pig with a crossbow walking on its hind legs with an equivalent kind of wooden shoe (fig. 4).⁶² In medieval imagery pigs are nega-

⁵⁹ www.kalkmalerier.dk—search: træsko in ting (the Danish characters can be replaced by * in the search field).

⁶⁰ www.kalkmalerier.dk—search: sh/188 (Roskilde Cathedral).

⁶¹ Francis Grew and Margrethe de Neergaard, *Shoes and Patterns, Medieval Finds from Excavations in London*, 2 (London: HMSO 1988), pp. 91–101.

⁶² Reproduced in Kurt Nielsen and Søren Skovfo, *Nibe kirke. Dens bygning*,

tively connoted.⁶³ The same type of shoe is to be found in Udbyneder.⁶⁴ Here it is worn by a devil, which at The Day of Judgement is chasing souls down to the Mouth of Hell. The devil's patten is worked out with a very long pointed toe. His other leg also is connected to wood: under his knee a wooden leg is fixed. In the Day of Judgement in Hørve church, a devil wears wooden shoes of a more ordinary kind on both feet.⁶⁵

In Gislev church, one of the tormentors at the Crowning of Thorns wears wooden shoes (fig. 5), as does the tormentor at the whipping of Christ in the Post-Reformation paintings of Sulsted (fig. 6).⁶⁶ In Hyllested church, in a marginal image, a man fighting a woman is wearing wooden shoes. On an arcade pillar in Århus Cathedral we find a caricature of a lansquenet.⁶⁷ His head with a long pointed beard is placed on a long bird's neck. In his hands he is holding a sword and a halberd. He has lost one of his legs, which is replaced by a wooden leg. On the other foot he wears an elegant pointed wooden shoe. This caricature of a lansquenet, like the above-mentioned figures, represents the evil and the dangerous. All examples, therefore, of the use of wooden shoes, are negatively connoted, regardless of who is wearing them. In the imagery of medieval Danish wall paintings, the wooden shoe does not exist as the footwear of the ordinary man, either for work or for leisure. There seems to be no difference between pattens and ordinary wooden shoes within the 'reality' of the images.⁶⁸

udsmykning og mennesker (Nibe: Nibe menighedsråd, 1995), p. 33.

⁶³ Frithiof Dahlby, *Symboler og tegn i den kristne kunst* (Copenhagen: J. Fr. Clausen, 1965), pp. 68 and 145; Dorthe Falcon Møller, *Music Aloft* (Copenhagen: Falcon, 1996), p. 99; see also Michael Camille, 'At the Sign of the Spinning Sow: The "Other" Chartres and Images of Everyday Life of the Medieval Street', in this volume.

⁶⁴ www.kalkmalerier.dk—search: 11/22 (Udbyneder).

⁶⁵ www.kalkmalerier.dk—search: 16/83 (Hørve).

⁶⁶ www.kalkmalerier.dk—search: sh/426 (Sulsted).

⁶⁷ www.kalkmalerier.dk—search: 66/68 (Århus Cathedral).

⁶⁸ The wooden shoe with high wedges (patten) was used as an overshoe for outdoor use. It is now and then depicted in Flemish painting where apparently it is impossible to find expressed any specific symbolic value. On a small altarpiece 'Christ carrying the Cross' *Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna. The Paintings* (London: Scala Books, 1997), p. 60, Hieronymus Bosch has a man near the cross wear pattens. It is difficult to say whether he represents Simon of Cyrene or an executioner; reproduced in Wolfgang Prohaska, *Kunsthistorisches Museum, Wien. The Paintings* (London: C. H. Beck/Scala Books, 1997), p. 60. In 'The Temptation of Saint Anthony' at Lisbon's Museo Nacional, Bosch depicts a strange figure who probably represents an evil messenger wearing pattens (Luís Afonso has kindly drawn my attention to this picture). On an altarpiece by Joos van Cleve (*Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna*), the Virgin Mary and the Jesus Child are seen together with Joseph, who has taken off one of his pattens, probably in respect for the holy child. In Jan Gossaert's 'St. Luke depicting The Virgin Mary with the Child', Luke

Jean-Claude Schmitt has written about the material and the symbolic realities in the Middle Ages with a starting-point in shoes. He refers to a story, a variant of the tale of the Jongleur de Notre-Dame, about a performer who for lack of money played a piece of music in honour of the representation of Jesus Christ at Volto Santo. The figure of Jesus gave his right shoe as a reward to the musician. Schmitt points to the fact that taking off a shoe indicates that you relinquish your possession of a woman or a field or that you convey your right to the one who

is kneeling at his drawing desk; he has taken off his pattens, apparently to show deference to Mary and her child; reproduced in Prohaska (op. cit.), p. 63. Taking off the pattens as a sign of deference is shown in several images. In Carlo Crivelli's 'The vision of the blessed Gabriel' (The National Gallery, London: NG 668), the saint is kneeling by the side of the Virgin Mary with the Child and has taken off his pattens. In Robert Campin's 'Merode altarpiece', the right wing is devoted to Joseph as a supplement to the central motif of the Annunciation. He is sitting in his workshop making a mousetrap. In all its realism Campin's painting is saturated with symbolism, and the mousetrap refers to St Augustine's statement that God had to make his appearance on earth in the shape of a human being in order to cheat the devil: 'The Lord's cross was the devil's mousetrap'. Under Joseph's long gown we see his left foot wearing a patten. Joseph, not showing deference but creating the symbolic devil's trap, keeps his wooden shoe on; reproduced in Jutta Held and Norbert Schneider, *Socialgeschichte der Malerei vom Spätmittelalter bis ins 20. Jahrhundert* (Cologne: DuMont, 1993), p. 25. In the 'Presentation in the Temple' (1450–1500) (The National Gallery, London: NG 706), Joseph is wearing beautiful pattens. In this scene he is not showing deference to the child and consequently he has not taken off his pattens. The most famous pair of pattens undoubtedly are those depicted in Jan van Eyck's 'The Betrothal of the Arnolfini' (The National Gallery, London). On the floor in front of Arnolfini lie his pattens with high wedges (see plate 1). They have long pointed toes like the pattens of Balthazar and the devil of Udbyneder. It seems obvious that he has taken off his overshoes, but their central position in the painting indicates that like St Luke he is showing deference to his fiancée. Arnolfini belonged to a wealthy milieu; drawing from the finds of excavations in London, Francis Grew and Margrethe de Neergaard state that especially during the late fourteenth century, pattens were worn in the City chiefly as a useful fashion accessory to protect the feet and the shoes of the well-to-do; see Grew and Neergaard (as in note 61), p. 91. In a wall painting by Domenico Di Bartolo in Santa Maria delle Scale, Siena (1443), a man is seen carrying a bier (?) wearing the same kind of wooden shoes; reproduced in Georges Duby, *An 1000 an 2000. Sur les traces de nos peurs* (Paris: Textuel, 1995), p. 35. All the above-mentioned representations of wooden shoes (pattens) differ from the pointed wooden shoes of the painter of Wooden Shoes. I dare say that the latter's wooden shoes (sabots) might contain a locally and socially delimited iconography of their own, but an iconography that anyhow connotes a widespread stratum of opposition and rebellion.

I have collected the above mentioned examples of depicted wooden shoes by travelling or looking in illustrated books and not by systematic research and certainly not—yet—by a search in image databases, which in the future without doubt will give me much more information to compare with the Danish material.



Fig. 6. Sulsed church. Wall painting, 'Whipping of Christ'. 1548. © Author

receives the shoe.⁶⁹ This notion connected to the shoe goes back to the book of Ruth in the Old Testament.⁷⁰ Whether there is a symbolic connection between this notion of shoes and the many depicted wooden shoes in the Danish churches I cannot say. It seems most likely, I think, that the connotations in the Danish paintings point in another direction.

⁶⁹ Jean-Claude Schmitt, 'Réalité materielle et réalité symbolique. A propos du soulier de Christ', in *Pictura quasi fictura. Die Rolle des Bildes in der Erforschung von Alltag und Sachkultur des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit*, ed. by Gerhard Jaritz (Vienna: Der österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1996), pp. 73–85. The fact that Arnolfini has taken off his shoes at Van Eyck's Betrothal of the Arnolfini might be evaluated in this perspective, but apparently it does not make logical sense.

⁷⁰ Ruth 4.7–8.

The many wooden shoes associated with the Painter of Wooden Shoes are not at any rate depictions of the footwear of peasants and artisans. They cannot function as symbols of bricklayers. Their design does not fit an analogue depiction of a piece of footwear. As symbolic representations, the wooden shoes connote provocation (Balthazar, the lansquenet, and the pig), violence (the tormentors), and alternative forces in opposition to the mightiest ruler (the devil). As a symbol, the long pointed toe connotes the dangerous. The murderous knife in the hand sticking out of a hole in Ørbæk church is grouped with the pointed wooden shoes in connoting danger, provocation, and rebellion. In this connection it is important to note that the French word for wooden shoe is *sabot* and that *sabotage* means both the making of wooden shoes and vandalism. About 1300, *saboter* meant to thrust or to wound, and during the sixteenth century the word meant to shake, shock, or to torment.⁷¹

We do not know if there is a connection in meaning between French etymology and the iconography of Danish wall paintings, but the identical nature of the contents is remarkable. The rebellious significance hidden in these ‘accidental’ wooden shoes is underlined by the time of their execution, the years around 1500. Exactly during these decades Germany experienced violent peasants’ rebellions that culminated in the 1520s. The revolutionary movement was named after its symbol of unity—a ‘Bundschuh’, which was the typical footwear of peasants in late medieval Germany. On their standards the peasants painted a shoe: the Bundschuh they wore themselves. The Bundschuh thus became the sign of rebellion.

At the same time as the Bundschuhbewegung, wooden shoes were painted in some twenty Danish churches gathered on southeast Funen and the surrounding islands, shoes that are depicted with a long pointed toe, which itself indicates rebellion. Shoes that in the imagery of the wall paintings are used by tormentors and devils. Shoes that can be found in decorations that deviate very much from traditional wall painting iconography. Faced with possible criticism from ecclesiastical authorities, the local peasants could answer: this is just an ordinary wooden shoe. But with René Magritte they would think: this is not a wooden shoe. With van Gogh they would feel that an image of a wooden shoe contains an infinity of meanings. Mutually they would know that the configurations on the vaults represent a sign of gathering, solidarity, resistance, and rebellion.

Martin Luther pinned his theses on church-doors as a natural place to disclose written communication. Inside the churches it was just as natural to communicate ideas and messages. The Painter of Wooden Shoes was not merely one

⁷¹ O. Bloch and W. von Wartburg, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue française*, 8th edn (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1989), p. 567; A. Greimas, *Dictionnaire de l'ancien français*, 2nd revised edn (Paris: Larousse, 1980), p. 576. Jérôme Baschet has kindly given me this information. Paul Robert, *Dictionnaire alphabétique et analogique de la langue française*, 2nd edn, 9 vols (Paris: Le Robert, 1985), VIII, pp. 520–21.

psychotic person; as a matter of fact, the decoration of more than twenty churches during a couple of decades involves several painters. They all have in common the use of alternative iconography in opposition to traditional religious imagery. They use the depiction of a wooden shoe with high wedges and long pointed toes as a common sign.

The present use of the database results in a theory that wooden shoes only belong to negatively connoted figures and situations, never to artisans' or peasants' daily life. Do the depicted wooden shoes in this specific part of Denmark at this specific period of European history indicate the parishioners' wish to take over their local churches? Do we see a visualized rebellion against the established church? Or is the wooden shoe a sign of resistance directed towards the land-owning lords?