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“Crowned with Many Crowns” Nuns and Their Statues in Late-Medieval Wienhausen

CAROLINE W. BYNUM*

The crowning of statues was a common practice in medieval cloisters, but at the north German convent of Wienhausen, the golden crowns of statues were confiscated by Observant reformers after the reformation of 1469. The nuns voiced distress at the loss of these crowns and made new Marian statues with elegant wooden crowns that were irremovable. The author puts the crowns worn by Mary in the context of the crowns worn by the nuns themselves and argues that such elaborate headdresses carried for the sisters many meanings; they include shaping female identity, signaling monastic commitment, and foreshadowing the rewards of heaven.

Keywords: Wienhausen; crowns; women’s monasticism; devotional objects; female identity

In the Lüneburg Heath in Lower Saxony lie the foundations of Ebstorf, Isenhagen, Lüne, Medingen, Walsrode, and Wienhausen, six Protestant female communities in the area of the former duchy of Braunschweig-Lüneburg now under the supervision of the Klosterkammer Hannover, a state authority.¹ For art historians, the most important of these is Wien-

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1. Seventeen cloisters and foundations are supervised by the Klosterkammer Hannover. See “Klosterkammer Hannover,” retrieved on April 15, 2014, from http://www.klosterkammer.de/html/kloester_stifte.html. In what follows I use material from the other five Lüneburg cloisters to supplement what we know about Wienhausen. On the Lüneburg cloisters, see *Niedersächsisches Klosterbuch: Verzeichnis der Klöster, Stifte, Kommenden und Beginenhäuser in Niedersachsen und Bremen von den Anfängen bis 1810*, ed. Josef Dolle with Dennis Knochenhauer, [Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Historische Landesforschung der Universität Göttingen, 56], (Bielefeld, 2012), and Ida-Christine Riggert, *Die Lüneburger Frauenklöster*, [Veröffentlichungen der historischen Kommission für Niedersachsen und Bremen 37, Quellen und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte Niedersachsens im Mittelalter, 19], (Hannover, 1996).

hausen.² A backwater in the twenty-first century, Wienhausen was anything but in the medieval period. Altcelle, close by, was the ducal seat in the thirteenth century, and Wienhausen was the ducal house cloister. Founded as a monastery for nuns in the 1220s, affiliated with but not incorporated into the Cistercians, Wienhausen was reformed in 1469 by Johannes Busch according to the Observant reform emanating from Windesheim, a first reformation that ushered in a cultural flowering. But Wienhausen's buildings and properties were partly destroyed in the mid-sixteenth century by the efforts of Duke Ernst the Confessor to impose the Lutheran reformation. Like other women's houses in the area, Wienhausen survived, changing only slowly over the course of the next two centuries. The nuns resisted Communion under two species and avoided the required suppression of the *Salve regina* until the late 1530s.³ Catholic abbesses were elected until 1587. The Cistercian habit was put off only in 1616; the Latin Hours ended only in 1620; as late as 1722, we find the Prince Elector of Hannover still trying to put a stop to the adorning of images with jewels and clothing.⁴ Today, the women's houses of the Lüneburg Heath, securely Protestant in commitment, work to preserve the cultural heritage of the area, a sense of vocation that emerged only in the twentieth century, fostered especially by the success of the 1928 exhibit of tapestries and embroideries made by the nuns of Wienhausen and Lüne. What is astonishing to the Anglophone world, used as it is to the results of the iconoclasm of the British Isles, is that Protestant Germany—and more than any other single place Wienhausen, with its collection of statues, the remarkable “Find” under the choirstalls in 1953 of small devotional objects, and the vibrant paintings of the nuns' choir itself—is the place where historians, the devout, and the curious public can best still see the art of the Middle Ages, undamaged and sometimes even in situ.⁵

2. See June L. Meacham, *Sacred Communities, Shared Devotions: Gender, Material Culture, and Monasticism in Late Medieval Germany*, ed. Alison I. Beach, Constance H. Berman, and Lisa M. Bitel (Turnhout, 2014) with full bibliography.

3. In the Lüneburg cloisters generally, the cult of the saints was forbidden and relics confiscated in 1555. Dieter Zimmerling, *Von Zeit und Ewigkeit: Die Lüneburger Klöster* (Braunschweig, 1995) gives a good account of the Protestant Reformation. At Wienhausen, the relics of the main altar in the nuns' choir were removed in 1543. See Horst Appuhn, “Der Auferstandene und das Heilige Blut zu Wienhausen: Über Kult und Kunst im späten Mittelalter,” *Niederdeutsche Beiträge zur Kunstgeschichte*, 1 (1961), 73–138, here 78.

4. Horst Appuhn, and Christian von Heusinger, “Der Fund kleiner Andachtsbilder des 13. bis 17. Jahrhunderts in Kloster Wienhausen,” *Niederdeutsche Beiträge zur Kunstgeschichte*, 4 (1965), 157–238, here 175 n. 24.

5. See Horst Appuhn, *Kloster Wienhausen*, 4: *Der Fund vom Nonnenchor* (Wienhausen, 1973); Appuhn and von Heusinger, “Der Fund”; and Wiebke Michler, *Kloster Wienhausen*:

The reasons why Catholic art survives best in Protestant Germany, and especially in women's cloisters, are complicated. German taste was always, as Jeffrey Hamburger has pointed out, conservative. In the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century south, however, where the Counter Reformation re-directed Catholic piety, baroque revivals removed or plastered over out-of-fashion medieval art. But in the north, the lack of political centralization meant that reform efforts were hard to enforce over large areas, nor was there money for redecorating projects; in Lower Saxony, a number of communities went back and forth between Protestantism and Catholicism. After the peasant depredations in Wittenberg, Martin Luther made it clear that images are *adiaphora* (indifferent things), dangerous if revered but harmless if used by the faithful to focus their worship on the God beyond, who is the only font of salvation. Hence medieval statues, liturgical vestments, chalices, and so forth survived, sometimes simply overlooked in treasuries, sometimes reused in all their original splendor.⁶

The Lüneburg convents survived because it was in the economic and dynastic interests of the aristocracy and the patriciate to provide for supernumerary women, and some sort of monastic commitment protected the family inheritance from further demands for dowries or upkeep once daughters or widows were placed. (Even if Protestant ladies could leave the cloister to marry, very few did so.)⁷ Probably, as Hamburger has also suggested, more

Die Wandmalereien im Nonnenchor (Wienhausen, 1968), p. 59. The painting was probably initially done soon after the choir was built in 1308; the Chronicle tells us that it was renewed in 1488 by three nuns named Gertrude; it was again restored in 1867–68. Since the rather sharp black outlines of the figures long continued to show through, it is likely that the restorers followed the originals closely. Moreover the paintings as we see them today follow the style of the late Romanesque of the region.

6. Johann Michael Fritz, "Die bewahrende Kraft des Luthertums – Mittelalterliche Kunstwerke in evangelischen Kirchen," and Günther Wartenberg, "Bilder in den Kirchen der Wittenberger Reformation," in *Die bewahrende Kraft des Luthertums: Mittelalterliche Kunstwerke in evangelischen Kirchen*, ed. Johann Michael Fritz (Regensburg, 1997), pp. 9–18 and 19–33, and Jeffrey Hamburger, "Am Anfang war das Bild: Kunst und Frauenspiritualität im Spätmittelalter," in *Studien und Texte*, pp. 1–43, here pp. 3–5. In her introduction to *Iconography of Liturgical Textiles in the Middle Ages*, ed. Evelin Wetter (Riggisberg, 2010), pp. 7–15, Wetter comments on the large number of survivals in Protestant Hungary.

7. The goal of providing for daughters and widows was not the only reason for survival. Piety continued. See Wolfgang Brandis, "Quellen zur Reformationsgeschichte der Lüneburger Frauenklöster," in *Studien und Texte zur literarischen und materiellen Kultur im späten Mittelalter: Ergebnisse eines Arbeitsgesprächs in der Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel, 24.–26. Febr. 1999*, ed. Falk Eisermann, Eva Schlotheuber, and Volker Honemann (Leiden, 2004), pp. 357–91, here pp. 359–60, and Merry Wiesner-Hanks, Introduction, in *Convents Confront the Reformation: Catholic and Protestant Nuns in Germany*, ed. and trans. Merry Wiesner-

survives of women's monastic art in German areas because, given the extraordinary flowering of women's monasticism, there was more there to begin with. Although the munificence of the dukes and others to the convents gradually fell away in the early-modern period, the art survived, protected by lack of funds from damaging renewal. In the twentieth century, at the demand of the sisters and in keeping with their new historicist vocation, some of the pieces that had been removed to museums were returned.⁸

I wish to begin this essay with a discussion of two Wienhausen statues of the Madonna, especially the colorful history of her crowns. Wienhausen is an ideal test case for what we can learn from objects because we do not have, for the north of Germany, the mystical writing and books of revelations by women that flowered, especially in the Rhineland, in the fourteenth century—works that have been used with such skill by a number of historians, preeminent among them Ulinka Rublack, to gloss the spiritual meaning of the adorning of statues in liturgical performance and private devotion.⁹ From the Lüneburg cloisters, we do not have the words of impassioned devotion lavished by a Margaret Ebner on the Christ child or the piling up of remarkable visions in nuns' books such as those of Unterlinden or Töss, although we must also note that similar works had died out even in the south by the fifteenth century under the pressure and skepticism of theologians and Observant reformers.¹⁰ From Wienhausen and her sister houses, we have archival documents, prayer books in Latin and the vernacular, visitation reports of reformers, diaries (*Tagebücher*) and letters, a number of small devotional pictures (sometimes glossed) made by the nuns themselves, and several chronicles, among them one from Wienhausen, written in the seventeenth century but drawn from a much earlier account.¹¹ Nonetheless, objects are the best place to start in exploring the nature of the nuns' devotion.

Hanks and Joan Skocir, [Reformation Texts with Translation (1350–1650)], (Milwaukee, 2004). But spiritual life slowly attenuated.

8. Horst Appuhn, *Kloster Wienhausen: Aufnahmen von Hans Grubenbecher, Dietrich Klatt und Jens Rheinländer* (Wienhausen, 1986), pp. 22–23, 61.

9. Ulinka Rublack, "Female Spirituality and the Infant Jesus in Late Medieval Dominican Convents," *Gender and History*, 6 (1994), 37–57.

10. See Werner Williams-Krapp, "Dise ding sint dennoch nit ware zeichen der heiligkeit: Zur Bewertung mystischer Erfahrungen im 15. Jahrhundert," *Zeitschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Linguistik* 80 (1990), 61–71, here 66–67, and Clare Taylor Jones, "Rekindling the Light of Faith: Hymn Translation and Spiritual Renewal in the Fifteenth-Century Observant Reform," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 42, (2012), 567–96, here 570 and 592 n. 12.

11. *Chronik und Totenbuch des Klosters Wienhausen*, intro. Horst Appuhn, 3rd ed. (Wienhausen, 1986). On sources generally, see Brandis, "Quellen."



FIGURE 1. Wienhausen, Enthroned Madonna, late-thirteenth century. Photo: Klosterarchiv Wienhausen.

I begin with an 89-cm-high Madonna and child, often called the “enthroned Madonna” (see figure 1), made in the late-thirteenth century at the same time as several other important devotional figures at Wienhausen. Much of the original color survives, although the throne has been partly pried open, perhaps to remove relics, the right hand, which probably held a scepter, has disappeared, and most of the sixty-six golden eagles that once decorated her blue mantle have been ripped off. Part of a dress that was made for her by the nuns still survives, and the groove that runs around her head shows that she was from the beginning intended to carry a removable crown.¹² Indeed, wear on the head suggests that several crowns may have been alternated during the liturgical year.

We know from the survival of at least twenty garments made for the Wienhausen images that the nuns clung to the practice of adorning their statues.¹³ The large number of needles, thimbles, and sewing materials such as thread and pearls found under the steps of the choir in 1953 sug-

12. Charlotte Klack-Eitzen, Wiebke Haase, and Tanja Weissgraf, *Heilige Röcke: Kleider für Skulpturen in Kloster Wienhausen* (Regensburg, 2013), p. 52. A dress for the naked Christ child held by the so-called processional Madonna also survives. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

13. These garments have recently been published in a magnificent catalog with detailed discussion; see Klack-Eitzen et al., *Heilige Röcke*.

gests that the sisters did needlework there; inventories down into the eighteenth century list dresses, crowns, and jewelry for the statues; and repairs to the garments themselves suggest that they were in use well into the seventeenth century, although some of their decorations, especially the gold bangles, were cut off and sold. The memorial book of Wienhausen gives evidence (unfortunately undated) of garments and jewelry donated specifically to statues.¹⁴

A crown and scepter of the sort with which the enthroned Madonna might have been adorned survive in the August Kestner Museum in Hannover; a similar crown, woven of wire with artificial flowers, survives for the Christ child from Heiligkreuz in Rostock, now in Güstrow.¹⁵ “*Corona*” in the Middle Ages meant both crown and wreath, although German texts distinguish “*kranz*” and “*krone*.” A few reliquary busts survive with woven wreaths, which evoke the bridal garlands bride and bridegroom had exchanged since antiquity as symbols of fertility and affection; more such busts and statues possess golden and jeweled crowns of the “*Bügel-*” (hoop) or “*Reifen-*” (ring) shape, evoking royalty and power.¹⁶ Although the Church Fathers, distancing themselves from pagan ceremonial, refused any language that implied human bestowal of crowns (only God crowns the martyrs), by the Middle Ages human beings regularly granted crowns to the saints.¹⁷ Even royal crowns were sometimes donated to statues: for example, the crown made for the baby Otto III was given to the Golden Madonna at Essen and later reduced in size to fit her head.¹⁸

14. *Chronik und Totenbuch*, pp. xlii, xlv, and lxi. (Page numbers refer to those of the original manuscript. Arabic numerals refer to the *Chronik*; Roman numerals refer to the *Totenbuch*. For the Chronicle, the editor has reordered the material to make it chronological.)

15. Klack-Eitzen et al., *Heilige Röcke*, pp. 21–23; Hamburger, “Am Anfang,” pp. 33 and 35. The Christ child from Heiligkreuz is still sometimes displayed with his crown.

16. *Krone und Schleier: Kunst aus mittelalterlichen Frauenklöstern: Ruhrländmuseum, die frühen Klöster und Stifte 500–1200: Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, die Zeit der Orden 1200–1500*, ed. the Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Bonn, and the Ruhrländmuseum Essen (Munich, 2005), pp. 394–95. On the parallel to bridal wreaths, see Désirée Koslin, “The Robe of Simplicity: Initiation, Robing, and Veiling of Nuns in the Middle Ages,” in *Robes and Honor: The Medieval World of Investiture*, ed. Stewart Gordon (Basingstoke, UK, 2001), pp. 255–74, which uses almost exclusively English material.

17. N. Gussone, “Krönung,” and A. Laag, “Kranz,” in *Lexikon der Christlichen Ikonographie*, 2 (Freiburg, 1970), pp. 661–71 and 558–60; and E. Vavra “Kleidung,” and V.H. Elbern, “Krone,” *Lexikon des Mittelalters*, 5 (Munich, 2002), 1198–1200 and 1544–47.

18. *Krone und Schleier*, pp. 166–67. In 1474, Mary of York’s wedding crown was presented to the cathedral at Aachen, where it is still today placed on a devotional statue at festivals; see Klack-Eitzen et al., *Heilige Röcke*, p. 21.

Yet the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century crowns of Wienhausen's enthroned Madonna do not survive. And we know why. The Chronicle tells us that, in the 1469 reform:

[T]he Duke and the Reformers came once more into the cloister and when all were assembled in the choir, the abbot of St. Michael's commanded every sister . . . to surrender all money and dishes and other things they possessed before. . . . And they agreed and brought . . . from the summer refectory pots, kettles, jars, and other . . . vessels and also the best veils they were accustomed to use on feast days and other valuable things for God's service, which they had made with much work. And the abbess of Derneburg took these and similar things as a thief would and through her nuns and friends in Braunschweig and elsewhere sold them for a small price, among them silver spoons, golden rings, and two golden crowns worked artfully from the best gold. And also several gold crowns for the images of Mary, Alexander and other saints, and a gold chain set with pearls and precious gems on which were images of the saints . . . and decorations and valuable things from the choir—all of these were taken from the cloister. . . . They were promised to be returned but they were never seen again. . . . The images of the saints and their adornments were held in low esteem, and many good customs were abolished and declared to be foolishness, and from these [acts] many a soul that was at peace before was cast into anguish and sadness.¹⁹

We know from other sources that the Observant reformers were attacking both the proliferation of private devotional objects and what they saw as ostentatious display (for example, those “best veils”) in the cloister.²⁰ We also know both that the nuns of the Lüneburg cloisters struggled to restore the wealth of their chapels and their properties, despite repeated confiscations, and that private devotion, including the use of small prayer-cards and devotional objects in private cells, as well as radical differences among the sisters in habit and food, continued. As Robert Suckale has explained, houses of aristocratic canonesses in Germany never practiced poverty of life, and Wienhausen—despite its affiliation with the Cistercians—was in many ways more like a house of canonesses.²¹ When in

19. *Chronik*, pp. 22–23. According to Brandis, “Quellen,” p. 391, the sixteenth-century reformers showed some bad conscience about later confiscations of the nuns' property.

20. On efforts by the reformers Johannes Meyer and Johannes Busch to curb private devotion, which also make clear that it continued, see Jeffrey F. Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany* (New York, 1998), pp. 440–41.

21. Robert Suckale, *Die mittelalterlichen Damenstifte als Bastionen der Frauenmacht*, [Kölner Juristische Gesellschaft, 25], (Cologne, 2001).

1499, a widow of the ducal house was lodged at Wienhausen, her aristocratic attire was accepted. “Her habit was outwardly worldly but her modesty was religious and pious . . .”²² If the community initially opposed her entry, it was not because of her wealthy accoutrements but because they feared (as turned out to be the case) that the income promised to support her would not be forthcoming.²³

The nature and process of the fifteenth-century reform, about which others have written, are not what concern me here, however. What interests me is that we have in these lines one of the very few expressions in the entire Wienhausen Chronicle of spiritual concerns. The loss of the saints and their adornments, including those “artfully worked” golden crowns, caused spiritual as well as economic anguish.

Although the miracle-working figure of the resurrected Christ was given a new silver crown after the confiscations, we do not have clear evidence that Mary’s removable crowns were restored during the reigns of the next two Wienhausen abbesses.²⁴ But a new Mary figure, made around 1480, the so-called processional Mary (see figure 2), who was provided with iron hand-grips so she could be carried, had a very elaborate crown and scepter made of wood; her regalia were, so to speak, built in. The apocalyptic Mary placed on the high altar made for the nuns’ choir in 1519 also has an elaborate wooden crown.²⁵ Thus, whatever happened—and we

22. *Chronik*, p. 32. The vision of St. Anne received by the ill abbess Katharina von Hoya shortly before 1433 is also instructive; *Chronik*, p. 14. Understanding herself to be chastised for spending lavishly on her private dwelling, the aristocratic abbess made that dwelling into a chapel. But the resplendent dress of the St. Anne who appeared to her was understood to be entirely appropriate. See June Meacham, “Katharina von Hoya’s Saint Anne Chapel: Female Piety, Material Culture, and Monastic Space on the Eve of the Reformation,” in *Frauen-Kloster-Kunst: Neue Forschungen zur Kulturgeschichte des Mittelalters: Beiträge zum Internationalen Kolloquium vom 13. bis 16. Mai 2005 anlässlich der Ausstellung “Krone und Schleier,”* ed. Jeffrey F. Hamburger, Carola Jäggi, Susan Marti, and Hedwig Röckelein in cooperation with the Ruhrlandmuseum Essen ([Turnhout], 2007), pp. 177–85.

23. Nowhere in late-medieval piety is there the assumption that equality of religious value or of piety means sameness. However much the Observant reformers may have wished to enforce upon women’s houses both claustration and poverty, no medieval Christian could fail to note (as both text and image clearly demonstrated) that even after the Last Judgment, resurrected bodies would bear their individuality and indicate their unequal statuses in their headgear. For an excellent discussion of the nuns’ relationship to “property,” both before and after the Observant reform, see Meacham, *Sacred Communities*, pp. 89–126.

24. Susanna Potstock (1470–1501), a reformer who was accepted by the convent, and Katharina Remstede (1501–49, driven from the cloister for several years during efforts to impose the Lutheran reformation).

25. See Appuhn, *Kloster Wienhausen: Aufnahmen*, plate 27.



FIGURE 2. Wienhausen, Processional Madonna, c. 1480. Photo: Klosterarchive Wienhausen.

know that opposition to the practice of clothing and crowning statues increased during efforts to impose the Lutheran reformation—the new processional Mary and the Mary of the high altar of 1519 could not lose their crowns again. Crowns mattered. Why?

A number of historians, among them Richard Trexler, Ulinka Rublack, Jeffrey Hamburger, and Amy Powell have explored with sympathy the practice of adorning statues that was formerly ridiculed as the craving of deprived or frustrated women for erotic experience or motherhood.²⁶ Powell, building on some of the ideas of Joseph Koerner, has argued that dressing statues, and constructing them with movable arms or legs to facilitate dressing, causes distance and becomes a prelude to the demotion of the image into an object that presages Reformation iconoclasm. A doll that can be manipulated declares itself not alive. In contrast, a number of his-

26. Richard Trexler, “Der Heiligen neue Kleider. Eine analytische Skizze zur Be- und Entkleidung von Statuen,” in *Gepeinigt, begehrt, vergessen: Symbolik und Sozialbezug des Körpers im späten Mittelalter und in der frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Klaus Schreiner and Norbert Schnitzler (Munich, 1992), pp. 362–402; Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, “Holy Dolls: Play and Devotion in Florence in the Quattrocento,” in *Women, Family, and Ritual in Renaissance Italy* (Chicago, 1985), pp. 310–31; Rublack, “Female Spirituality and the Infant Jesus”; Hamburger, Introduction in Klack-Eitzen et al., *Heilige Röcke*, pp 7–8; Amy Knight Powell, *Depositions: Scenes from the Late Medieval Church and the Modern Museum* (New York, 2012), pp. 81–95, 167–209.

torians stress that clothing a statue gives it value and presence; changing its clothes makes the body underneath both more mysterious and more alive. Despite these differences of emphasis, what is clear in both interpretations is that adorning an image is a reciprocal and processual gesture; it gives agency to both the one doing the clothing and the one clothed; it is an experience extended over time, not a mere moment of encounter. In the complex religious act that is sometimes denominated *do ut des* but also involves “the distinctive devotional logic of presence” in which part is whole, the devotee gives to Mary the crown she wears in heaven, just as she will give, or has given, grace and love, comfort and presence, to the devotee.²⁷ Indeed, as Thomas Lentès has brilliantly demonstrated, what he calls fictive crowns are reciprocal, too.²⁸ The nuns of Töss who wove a garment for Mary with their devotions but needed to say fifty additional prayers in order to complete its sleeves, the sisters in Strasbourg who made for St. Ursula through prayer “a golden crown . . . befitting . . . a queen,” the roses depicted in a late fifteenth-century painting as plucked from the mouth of a Dominican and woven into a rosary wreath by Mary—all are part of reciprocal gift-giving. Intimate and vibrant, the exchange is also proleptic.²⁹ Both in the temporal process of praying and in the realm outside of earthly time, the devotee gives and receives, lifted into glory by a gift that is the giver herself.

Another story in the Wienhausen chronicle refers explicitly to the enthroned Mary. It tells of a goldsmith, who was unjustly thrown into

27. I borrow the phrase “devotional logic of presence” from Robert A. Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880–1950*, 3rd ed. (New Haven, 2010), p. xvi; I have called this way of seeing the “concomitant habit of mind” in Caroline Walker Bynum, *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe* (New York, 2011), pp. 208–15. *Do ut des*—I give that you may give—is frequently invoked as a fundamental characteristic of religious worship.

28. Thomas Lentès, “Die Gewänder der Heiligen—Ein Diskussionsbeitrag zum Verhältnis von Gebet, Bild und Imagination,” in *Hagiographie und Kunst: Der Heiligenkult in Schrift, Bild und Architektur*, ed. Gottfried Kerscher (Berlin, 1993), pp. 120–51. For the example from Töss, see *ibid.*, p. 120.

29. Lentès, “Die Gewänder,” pp. 124–25. On the development of rosary devotion in this period and its importance for nuns, see *Rosenkränze und Seelengärten: Bildung und Frömmigkeit in niedersächsischen Frauenklöstern*, ed. Britta-Juliane Kruse (Wiesbaden, 2013), especially Julie Hotchin, “Meditations for a nun’s coronation from Wöltingerode,” pp. 117–24. See also June Meacham, “Reading between the Lines: Compilation, Variation, and the Recovery of an Authentic Female Voice in the *Dornenkron* Prayer Books from Wienhausen,” *Journal of Medieval History*, 29 (2003), 109–28, here 121, with examples of nuns offering crowns of prayers to Mary. For the St. Ursula example, see Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary*, p. 78 n. 208.

prison, where he had little hope of freedom until an angel appeared and advised him that he should make a golden crown for “the Mary image in the chapel in the middle of the cloister at Wienhausen.” When he promised to do this, the angel freed him; he then went to Wienhausen to measure Mary’s head and made a crown for her with his own hands. Although in this case reward preceded gift, the reciprocity of the gifting is clear.³⁰

I cite a third story from the Chronicle that demonstrates the way in which clothing and crown were not only part of a complex gift-exchange but also markers, indeed creators, of identity.³¹ In 1529, after the onset of the second or Lutheran reformation, the wife of a burgher of Braunschweig came to the convent and attempted to force her daughter to flee. Although the abbess hid the girl, the mother threatened to denounce the cloister to the duke, so the abbess permitted the girl to go home, supposedly for three days only. But the girl’s parents then pressured her to renounce the cloistered life “and when she did not want to conform to their will, they took away from her the cloister-wreath and habit [*Kloster-Krantz und Habiet*]” and forced her to take other clothes. The girl, however, arising very early while her parents slept, managed to escape, and fled to Wienhausen. When she arrived, she found the doors locked. So she waded through the Aller river, came to the cloister on the other side, and hurried into the choir where the sisters were singing and praying. Shocked by the appearance of a wet and bedraggled figure in worldly clothes, the nuns feared that a catastrophe, such as enemy attack or fire, had occurred. (They obviously thought a secular person had breached the bounds of the choir.) When finally the girl was recognized, thanks were given, and in the presence of all the sisters, the abbess robed her again in “spiritual clothes.” Although this was not (alas, for the nuns and for the girl) quite the end of the story, it makes clear that both for the parents, who insisted on removing crown and habit, and for the sisters, who did not recognize the girl in her worldly attire, clothing constituted identity.

This story, with its singling out of the *Kloster-Krantz* as a sign of the nun’s identity, suggests that the crowns of statues, whether removable or not, may need to be viewed in a wider context. For the nun’s crown was especially important in the liturgy and the life of north German convents and, as we shall see, stood in a special relationship to Mary’s heavenly crown. In order to understand this, it is important to note that the role of

30. *Chronik*, p. 142. We are told explicitly that this story concerns the crown that “was at the time of the first reformation taken out of the cloister along with many other things.”

31. *Chronik*, pp. 67–70.

clothing in constituting the nun has not, until the recent work of Eva Schlotheuber, been very well understood.³²

From the days of the early Church, the significance of clothes had been debated. Pope Celestine I in 428 said: “We distinguish ourselves from others by *doctrina* not *vesta*.”³³ Lothar of Segni, in his work on the misery of the human condition, told with disapproval the conventional story of a philosopher valued for his dress rather than his virtues; as Pope Innocent III, he ruled that “it is not the habit that makes the monk but profession of the rule.”³⁴ Monastic clothing was a witness, just as the reliquary witnessed the holiness of the relic it contained or the king’s garments bodied forth his power; the habit could even be understood as a sign that helped conduce into being what it signified. But in the north German area, the monastic habit was not itself consecrated, and the male novitiate was a real probationary period, at the end of which the novice made a choice.³⁵ In the wake of the emphasis on personal intentionality that characterized piety from the twelfth century on (an emphasis that led to the rejection of male child oblation and to an understanding of monastic entrance fees as simony), vow not garb—that is, the making of profession, freely and as an adult, not the habit—was understood to constitute the monk. In large part because late-medieval reformers and canon lawyers attempted to insist that this should be so for nuns, historians have sometimes assumed the same for convents.

32. Eva Schlotheuber, *Klostereintritt und Bildung: Die Lebenswelt der Nonnen im späten Mittelalter. Mit einer Edition des ‘Konventstagebuchs’ einer Zisterzienserin von Heilig-Kreuz bei Braunschweig (1484–1507)* (Tübingen, 2004); Eva Schlotheuber, “Ebstorf und seine Schülerinnen in der zweiten Hälfte des 15. Jahrhundert,” in *Studien und Texte*, pp. 169–221; Eva Schlotheuber, “Klostereintritt und Übergangsriten: Die Bedeutung der Jungfräulichkeit für das Selbstverständnis der Nonnen der Alten Orden” in *Frauen-Kloster-Kunst*, pp. 43–55; and Eva Schlotheuber, “Best Clothes and Everyday Attire of Late Medieval Nuns,” in *Fashion and Clothing in Late Medieval Europe/Mode und Kleidung im Europa des späten Mittelalters*, ed. Rainer C. Schwinges and Regula Schorta with Klaus Oschema (Basel and Riggisberg, 2010), pp. 139–54. See also Evelin Wetter, “Von Bräuten und Vikaren Christi. Zur Konstruktion von Ähnlichkeit im sakralen Initiationsakt,” in *Similitudo: Konzepte der Ähnlichkeit in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit*, ed. Martin Gaier, Jeanette Kohl, and Alberto Saviello (Munich, 2012), pp. 129–46.

33. Quoted in Gil Bartholeyns, “Les objets contre les symboles: une sociologie chrétienne et médiévale du signe,” in *La performance des images*, ed. Alain Dierkins, Gil Bartholeyns, and Thomas Golsenne, [Problèmes d’histoire des religions, 19], (Brussels, 2010), pp. 137–56, here p. 142.

34. *Ibid.*, pp. 138–39 and 147. Jean-Claude Schmitt, “Les images et le sacré,” in *La performance*, pp. 29–46, and Thomas Golsenne, “Parure et culte,” in *ibid.*, pp. 71–85, are also very helpful.

35. Schlotheuber, *Klostereintritt und Bildung*, pp. 139–40.

As Eva Schlotheuber has shown, however, the rituals of female monasteries—especially those of north Germany—were different.³⁶ The practice of oblation—the giving of very young girls to the cloister by their relatives or guardians—continued and was performed with the clear understanding that they were to become nuns.³⁷ In oblation, relatives made a vow for the child that she could, in theory, later reject. But we know of no cases in north Germany in which this happened. Although technically still not monastic in status, the girl thus offered put aside her worldly clothes and received an unconsecrated habit and an unconsecrated nun's crown, constructed of two strips of fairly narrow white cloth that crisscrossed over the head and joined a band that went around the forehead (see figures 3 and 4). Not bound to the monastic vocation, the child nonetheless looked like a nun and was socialized as such. At Wienhausen, the offered child was placed physically on the altar, as a kind of visible sacrifice—a practice to which the fifteenth-century reformers objected as a violation of the prohibition against women inhabiting sacred space. So important was the ceremony to the convent, however, in part because it mirrored the presentation of the Virgin Mary in the temple when she was three years old, that the abbess, Katharina Remstede, in the opening decade of the sixteenth century commissioned a theological treatise to defend the practice.

At Lüne (the abbey about which we have the fullest information) the next stage in the fashioning of the young nun was her investiture (*Einkleidung*). At least three years after entry but often much longer, the girl was invested with a consecrated habit, girdle, and head-covering in a ceremony that took place in the nuns' choir and was the only occasion on which parents were permitted to enter the cloisters' inner walls. It was followed by a great feast, with dance and song, hosted by relatives, which paralleled a bridal feast, and was probably for the young woman the high point of the socialization process. The girl also received gifts from her family, which might include little statues of the saints, Jesus dolls with their clothes, or even (despite the efforts of reformers) fine veils for the girl herself. On this occasion, the crown she had worn before was taken away to be appliquéd

36. Schlotheuber, *Klostereintritt und Bildung*, p. 160.

37. The idea that convents served primarily to educate the female children of the aristocracy before they left to marry is a mistaken interpretation by modern historians, who have extrapolated back from the postreformation period, although such uses of convents were undoubtedly sometimes made; see generally Schlotheuber, *Klostereintritt und Bildung*, in *ibid.*, pp. 112–14. Schlotheuber cites a late-fifteenth-century chronicler who warns that secular girls with their “worldly clothing” in red and gold, with pearls and expensive headbands, would bring “corruption” for the future nuns.



FIGURE 3. Wienhausen, vault painting of donor, Agnes of Meissen, and her husband with abbesses and provosts, early-fourteenth century, restored in 1488 and 1867–68. Photo: Klosterarchiv Wienhausen.

at the five intersections with red crosses symbolizing the wounds of Christ. The consecrated crown was supposedly returned to the woman only when the bishop arrived to place it on her head and hear her profession, but that might not happen for many months or even years—not in fact until someone had died and made available a cell for the new nun. Both *oblatio* (which involved the parents' vow on behalf of the child) and investiture with the habit were understood in canon law to constitute over time a *tacita professio*—that is, simply by wearing the nun's garb without articulated objection, the young woman promised a life of virginity. So unimportant did the act of profession become that, as Schlotheuber has observed, the sources seldom speak of either a novitiate or of *professio*.³⁸ Hence, for the nun, clothes made the person in a sense not true for the monk, or the priest, or

38. At the Holy Cross cloister in Braunschweig, for example, the crucial term for transition to nun's status became the coinage *dies mansacionis* (from *mansare* or *manere*)—that is, the day on which the nun moved into her own cell. Schlotheuber, "Klostereintritt und Übergangsriten," p. 50. And see Julie Hotchin, "The Nun's Crown," *Early Modern Women: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 4 (2009), 187–94.

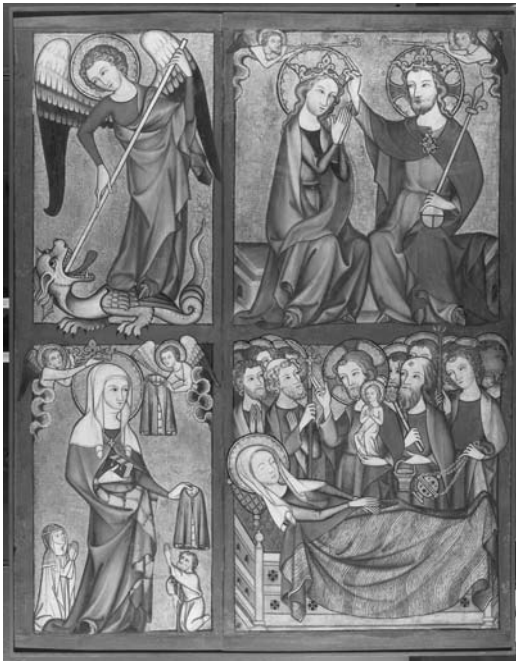


FIGURE 4. Right panel from Altenberg altar, showing a Premonstratensian nun venerating St. Elizabeth of Thuringia (bottom left) and the coronation of the Virgin (top right), c. 1330. Photo: © Städel Museum: ARTOTHEK.

even the male aristocrat (although his clothes were increasingly determined—and privileged—by sumptuary legislation).³⁹ In this constituting of the nun, at least in north German convents, the veil was legally the key, but it was the *corona* that made manifest the nun's hidden spiritual status as the *sponsa* of Christ.

To many medieval theorists, the person's head was the locus of her or his greatest likeness to Christ.⁴⁰ Moreover, head-covering is in many cul-

39. J. Schneider, "Kleiderordnungen," in *Lexikon des Mittelalters*, 5, 1197–98, and Ulinka Rublack, *Dressing Up: Cultural Identity in Renaissance Europe* (Oxford, 2010), pp. 81–123.

40. Wetter, "Von Bräuten," p. 130, and Schlotheuber, "Best Clothes," p. 146. On head-covering as a sign of status and its difference for men and women, see Gabriela Signori, "Veil, Hat or Hair? Reflections on an Asymmetrical Relationship," *The Medieval History Journal*, 8, no. 1 (2005), 25–47, retrieved on February 20, 2014, from <http://mhj.sagepub.com/content/8/1/25>.

tures the major sign of female status—both marital status and social class—and German nuns themselves provide evidence that the crown was particularly important in their self-definition.⁴¹ A *Tagebuch* from the Braunschweig Kreuzkloster makes it clear that the nuns wore their crowns even to bed.⁴² As Julie Hotchin has pointed out, bishops found the threat to remove crowns an effective way of enforcing discipline, and in Saxony, convents fought hard against Lutheran reformers who wished to forbid crowns.⁴³

We have some evidence, visual and textual, of what the crowns actually looked like. In the twelfth century, Peter Abelard mentions nuns' crowns with red crosses, and Tengswich of Andernach's letter to Hildegard of Bingen, criticizing her for dressing her nuns in bridal array, with embroidered crowns, is well known.⁴⁴ In the fifteenth century, the reformer Johannes Busch criticized canonesses for wearing crowns decorated with gold.⁴⁵ We have textual evidence from Lüne of crowns with red silk crosses and Henrike Lähnemann has pointed to several illuminations in Medingen manuscripts, showing nuns with red crosses over their veils, including a miniature (Hamburg Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Cod. in scrin 149 [HH8] fol. 10r) where a nun's head has been cut out and replaced with a new drawing when the style of the convent's headgear changed.⁴⁶ One of the little prayer cards discovered under the choirstalls at

41. Hotchin, "The Nun's Crown"; Wetter, "Von Bräuten"; Schlotheuber, "Best Clothes"; Koslin, "The Robe of Simplicity."

42. Schlotheuber, *Klostereintritt und Bildung*, p. 162 n. 204, and Schlotheuber, "Best Clothes," p. 153 n. 61.

43. Hotchin, "The Nun's Crown." The chronicler of the monastery of Heiningen near Hildesheim rejoiced, during a brief period of re-Catholicization: "we put on our crowns again." *Ibid.*, p. 194 n. 19.

44. The reference in Abelard is cited in Wetter, "Von Bräuten," p. 134 n. 24; Tengswich's letter is cited in *ibid.*, p. 135 n. 27, and Schlotheuber, "Best Clothes," p. 153. For Hildegard's defense, which rests on the claim that her virgins are wedded to holiness, see Barbara Newman, *Sister of Wisdom: St. Hildegard's Theology of the Feminine* (Berkeley, 1987), pp. 221–22. The real veils and crowns described in Tengswich's letter are identical to those in Hildegard's vision in *Scivias* 2.5 [Corpus christianorum: continuatio mediaevalis, 43], (Turnhout, 1978), pp. 174–75 and plate 14.

45. Johannes Busch, *Liber de reformatione monasteriorum*, in *Chronicon Windesbemense und Liber de reformatione monasteriorum*, ed. Karl Grube, [Geschichtsquellen der Provinz Sachsen und angrenzender Gebiete, 19], (Halle, 1886), p. 603.

46. I am grateful to Henrike Lähnemann for these references; she points also to Hildesheim Dombibliothek MS J 29 (H1) fol. 52r. See Ulrike Hascher-Burger and Henrike Lähnemann, *Liturgie und Reform im Kloster Medingen: Edition und Untersuchung des Propst-Handbuchs Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Lat. liturg. e. 18* (Tübingen, 2013), pp. 99–103, here p. 101; Hans-Walter Stork, "Handschriften des ehemaligen Zisterzienserinnenklosters Medingen zur Zeit der Klosterreform im 15. Jahrhundert und in nachreformatorischer Zeit,"

Wienhausen shows a nun with her red crosses, and there is a painting on the vault of the nuns' choir that shows an abbess in her crown (see figure 3).⁴⁷ In colonial Mexico, certain orders of nuns wore elaborate wreaths or crowns of flowers and jewels, whereas Brigittine nuns today wear metal crowns with red crosses, and other orders wear simple circlets of myrtle or thorns.⁴⁸ This evidence suggests that there may be two somewhat different traditions of crowning, one that emphasizes assimilation of the virgin nun to Christ's bride through suffering, the other more a foreshadowing of her glory in heaven. The fact that the "Find" under the Wienhausen choirstalls included three manuscripts of meditation on the crown of thorns (*Dornenkron*) suggests that references to crowns at Wienhausen had many valences, including both passion and triumph.⁴⁹

Eva Schlottheuber has argued convincingly that the crowns of the Lüneburg cloisters not only symbolized the commitment to virginity but also, by assimilating the new nun to the bride of the Song of Songs, elevated a life of virginity far beyond the "lay" status to which nuns were relegated by canon law. She quotes from the second reform report from Ebstorf, where a nun spells out this spiritual significance: "On the crown are four red crosses . . . which mean the five wounds of our crucified hus-

in *Evangelisches Klosterleben. Studien zur Geschichte der evangelischen Klöster und Stifte in Niedersachsen*, ed. Hans Otte (Göttingen, 2013), pp. 337–60, here pp. 349–53 and figure 6; and Henrike Lähnemann, "Schnipsel, Schleier, Textkombinatorik. Die Materialität der Medinger Orationalien," in *Materialität in der Editionswissenschaft*, ed. Martin Schubert (Tübingen, 2010), pp. 347–58, here p. 352. On the Medingen manuscripts, see <http://research.ncl.ac.uk/medingen>, accessed May 30, 2014.

47. For the little image of Bernward of Hildesheim venerated by a nun in her crown, see Appuhn, *Kloster Wienhausen*, 4: *Der Fund*, p. 33; for the vault painting, see Michler, *Kloster Wienhausen: Die Wandmalereien*, p. 59.

48. Elizabeth Perry, "Convents, Art and Creole Identity in Late Viceregal New Spain," in *Women and Art in Early Modern Latin America*, ed. Kellen Kee MacIntyre and Richard E. Phillips (Leiden, 2007), pp. 321–41, here p. 338. The crowns worn by Latin American nuns look very much like some of the crowns that survive for medieval statues. See Hamburger, "Am Anfang," pp. 33 and 35, figures 4, 7, and 8. At Marienstern in Saxony, the nuns who vow perpetual virginity are even today buried with their myrtle crowns; Marius Winzeler, "Die Bibliothek der Zisterzienserinnenabtei St. Marienstern. Zu Geschichte und Bestand einer frauenklösterlichen Büchersammlung des Mittelalters," in *Studien und Texte*, pp. 331–56, here p. 342. For an image of the Brigittines' crown, see "Brigittines," retrieved November 30, 2013, from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bridgettines>. For the Handmaids of the Precious Blood, who today wear circlets of real thorns at their profession and in death, see "Handmaids of the Precious Blood," retrieved November 30, 2013, from <http://www.nunsforpriests.org/Vocations/Vocations/ProfessionCeremony.html>.

49. Meacham, "Reading Between the Lines," and Meacham, *Sacred Communities*, pp. 205–60.

band, which we bear as the signs of the wounded Christ on our heads . . . as it says in the Song: ‘You have wounded my heart, my sister, my bride,’ that is, through love.”⁵⁰ In the first reform report, an Ebstorf sister went further, claiming a status that in some ways mirrors Mary’s Immaculate Conception: “To this noble and worthy condition, God foresaw us and pre-elected us before we were received in our mother’s body.”⁵¹

To my knowledge, there is only one surviving nun’s crown from the Middle Ages. Now in the possession of the Abegg Stiftung in Riggisberg, Switzerland, it came on the art market in 2001 and is of unknown provenance.⁵² Two bands of lovely twelfth-century silk cross over the head and are held in place with a silk circlet. (The blue cap that provides support underneath is sixteenth or seventeenth century.) Attached are five appliqués in gold thread: the lamb of God, an angel, a cherub or seraph, a king with raised hands (probably Solomon), and (on the crossing) a star (possibly a reference to *Stella Maris*). In a sensitive analysis, Evelin Wetter goes beyond the suggestion that the crown constructs the nun as Christ’s bride and argues that it fashions her into similitude to the Virgin herself, crowned as queen of heaven by her son at her ascension.⁵³

The texts and objects that survive from late-medieval women’s cloisters help us to understand the multiple ways in which “crowning”—whether of the young nun herself or of the statues of Mary and the saints, whether with a physical crown of silk or gold wire or with a “fictive” wreath or *corona* of prayers—actually shaped the one crowned and bound her into a reciprocal relationship. Giving to the queen of heaven yet another crown was a participation in her eternal crowning and inclined her to give gifts to the giver in return. A bestowal of the consecrated nun’s crown, whether embroidered with the saving wounds of Christ or with the angels who celebrate Mary’s place at the right-hand of her son, lifted the young nun toward the glory to which she aspired by her virginity. Yet we should be

50. Schlotheuber, *Klostereintritt und Bildung*, p. 164 n. 217: “In corona sunt quattuor cruces rubee cum transf[. . .]nant crucifixi sponsi nostri quinque vulnera, quod in signum Christi vulnerati gerebimus in capite, ut semper simus memores nostri sponsi, in canticis ubi dicit: ‘Vulnerasti cor meum, soror mea sponsa,’ scilicet per amorem.”

51. Schlotheuber, *Klostereintritt und Bildung*, p. 162. On the occasion of her nieces’ investiture, an abbess of Medingen called the new nuns “co-citizens of the angels.” Schlotheuber, *Klostereintritt und Bildung*, p. 166: “concives angelorum.”

52. In conversation (January 28, 2014), Evelin Wetter told me that the sale catalogue suggested French provenance, but she considers this unlikely. For a color image of the crown, see Schlotheuber, “Best Clothes,” p. 146, figure 7.

53. Wetter, “Von Bräuten.”

careful not to go too far in understanding the crowns offered to Mary, Christ, and the saints as literally the accoutrements of heaven or in assimilating the crowned nun here on earth to her heavenly reward. Both the texts and the objects show us that the nuns themselves saw a gap between earth and heaven.

Gertrude the Great (d. 1301 or 1302) of the Saxon convent of Helfta, whose *Spiritual Exercises* provide a lengthy commentary on the nun's crowning, speaks of the nun's consecration as a process toward heaven. Christ promises: "I will make you a robe of the noble purple of my precious blood; I will crown you with the choice gold of my bitter death." And the young sister prays in response: "Make me to go on my way to you in my nuptial gown among the prudent virgins."⁵⁴ The crown is both the crown of thorns and the bridal wreath. The crowning is reciprocal: Christ and the nun are clothed with each other, and this is completed only in heaven.⁵⁵ The nun prays: "And after this life, may I deserve to receive the crown of chastity in a long white gown among a lily-like band, following you, lamb without spot, son of the Virgin Mary, wherever you go."⁵⁶ In the homier stories of Gertrude's *Legatus*, much of which was written about her by her sisters, Gertrude questions why a certain person who has died receives the garment of glory immediately while an equally worthy person, still alive, is not yet clothed with the "marvelously embroidered" robe of Christ.⁵⁷ The implication is clear: on earth the garment can still be soiled and wrinkled. The crown the nun receives at her earthly investiture both is—and is not yet—her crowning in heaven.

Crowning rituals from the Lüneburg cloisters show the same awareness of both the collapsing together and the distinction of earth and

54. Gertrude of Helfta, *Oeuvres spirituelles*, 1: *Les Exercices* 3, ed. Jacques Hourlier and Albert Schmitt, [Sources chrétiennes 127], (Paris, 1967), pp. 98 and 104; also Gertrude the Great of Helfta, *Spiritual Exercises* 3, trans. Gertrud Jaron Lewis and Jack Lewis, [Cistercian Fathers Series, 49], (Kalamazoo, 1989), pp. 43 and 47. And on Gertrude's use of clothing metaphors, see Michael Bangert, "The Metaphor of the Vestment in the Writings of Gertrud of Helfta (1256–1302)," in *Iconography of Liturgical Textiles*, ed. Wetter, pp. 129–39.

55. See Gertrude, *Legatus divinae pietatis* 3.18, ed. the monks of Solesme, *Revelationes Gertrudianae ac Mechtildianae* 1 (Paris, 1875), p. 151: Christ speaks: "Ecce jam induor te ad hoc ut delicatam manum meam illaesam extendere possim inter hispidos peccatores, ad beneficiendum eis; et vestio te meipso ad hoc, ut omnes quos in tua memoria ad meam ducis praesentiam . . . ad illam trahas dignitatem, ut eis secundum meam regalem munificentiam beneficiere possim."

56. Gertrude, *Les Exercices* 3, ed. Hourlier and Schmitt, p. 118; *Exercises* 3, trans. G. J. Lewis and J. Lewis, p. 54.

57. Gertrude, *Legatus* 3.65, pp. 241–42.

heaven. In a notice about the nuns' crowning of 1464 at Ebsdorf, a sister describes why Easter and the five Sundays after are all suitable for the "twofold espousal" of the nun to her bridegroom. The text closely assimilates the crowns Christ wins for souls by his precious blood and the crown the nun receives both now and "in the future" as reward for her virginity.⁵⁸ But a passage from a Middle Low German prayerbook from the neighboring convent of Medingen makes clear in the nuns' own words that the coronation is completed only after death. The Easter liturgy is here understood as a dialogue between Christ and the soul, in which the nun's crown becomes an attribute of the resurrected body.⁵⁹

When our dear Lord hears the praise offered by Holy Christendom, he says to the devout soul: *Resurrexi et adhuc tecum sum*—I am risen from the dead and have taken back to me all the glory [*clarcheit*] and honor which I have had from the beginning of the world. *Et adhuc tecum sum*—and I am still with you, o devout soul, by my grace, and I shall sustain in you the blessedness which you will receive from me when I take you from this world to me, because you take me now to you in true commitment. Then I shall lay upon you the hand of my honor and shall crown you because you bear . . . some grief when remembering my suffering, and therefore you will be with me in eternal joy. Then you will be shown to the angels, since I will create anew your mortal body in the image of the *clarcheit* of my body. This you will receive after this life as I have received it twofold in my resurrection, in my Godhead and my humanity.⁶⁰

The crowning is reciprocal, both present and future. Christ and the nun each enfold the other in love, but the final crowning is in heaven, when the mortal

58. Schlotheuber, *Klostereintritt und Bildung*, pp. 164–65 nn. 220–23.

59. Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin—Preussischer Kulturbesitz MS germ. oct. 265, fols. 90v–92r, which is Medingen BE 3, a Middle Low German prayerbook from the Cistercian Convent of Medingen, Lower Saxony; probably written by a lay sister. I thank Henrike Lähnemann for calling my attention to this.

60. "Wan de leve got horet dat loff der hilgen cristenheit so (91r) secht he to der innigen sele also: "Resurrexi et adhuc tecum sum"—Ick bin upgestan van dem dode unde hebbe wedder to mi genamen alle de clarcheit unde ere, de ik gehad hebbe van beginne der werlt. "Et adhuc tecum sum"—unde bin noch mi di, o innige sele, vormiddelst miner gnade unde an mi is behude salicheit, de du van mi nemen scholt, wan ik van desser werlt di to me neme darumme dat du mi nu to di nimpst in waren loven. Denne wil ik up di lecghen de hant miner ere unde wil di kronen, darumme dat du (91v) underwilen mine hant drichst vei wesen in der ewigen froude. Denne scholtu wunderlick openbaren den enghelschen gheisten, wan ik dinen sterfflicken licham wedder schippen wille, lick gebildet der clarcheit mines lichammes. Dit scholtu tomalen emfangen na dessem levende, also ik in miner upstandinge twevolt emfangen hebbe an miner gotheit unde an miner minscheit." Transcription by Henrike Lähnemann; translation by Lähnemann and Bynum.

body is created anew in the gifts of the resurrection.⁶¹ We are reminded of those medieval depictions of the Last Judgment in which naked figures rising from the dead are still distinguished in status by their headgear.⁶²

This proleptic and processual quality is also seen in what the crowns actually looked like. Even the elegant surviving crown now at Riggisberg, although it may in form be a kind of *Bügelkrone* with gold embroidery, does not physically point upward as do royal crowns of the type we see on the processional Madonna at Wienhausen (see figure 2) or on the multitude of saints and martyrs depicted on the Wienhausen ceiling. Indeed, if we compare the nun's crown (a simple cap) worn by the abbess in the image of the convent's founders on the Wienhausen vaults (see figure 3) with adjacent images of the twenty-four golden-crowned elders of the Apocalypse or the diadem used by Christ to crown his mother in heaven, they do not appear to be the same sort of crown at all. The contrast is even more striking if we consider an image of 1519 from Marienstern, which shows a novice being shorn. Beside her, a nun holds the simple cap she will later receive as her crown. Above, breaking out of the picture space, hovers the very different sort of golden crown she will receive only in heaven.⁶³ The image most frequently used by scholars to illustrate the medieval nun's crown shows the same contrast (see figure 4). A panel (about 1330) from the Altenberg Altar pairs a Premonstratensian nun as donor wearing her modest crown and venerating St. Elizabeth of Thuringia with a panel above on which Christ crowns Mary in heaven with a golden diadem whose pinnacles gleam, thrusting upward. Over Elizabeth, an angel hovers with the crown of glory she supposedly wears in heaven, but even it has not quite come to rest on the saint's head. Depicted as eternally giving clothes to beggars as she did while on earth, even the departed and sanctified Elizabeth seems almost still in process toward the coronation Mary has achieved in heaven. The little donor nun in the left hand corner wears a crown but not yet a crown of glory.

Indeed, the Mary depicted on the vaults of Wienhausen, like the processional Madonna whose wooden crown was safe from confiscation by reformers (see figure 2), were themselves foreshadowings of heaven. Many scholars have recently emphasized the living quality of late-medieval

61. *Clarheit* or *Claritas* is one of the four gifts with which the immortal soul endows the resurrected body, according to scholastic theology; see Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200–1336* (New York, 1995), pp. 131–32.

62. See, for example, *ibid.*, plate 33.

63. Winzeler, "Die Bibliothek," p. 343, figure 3.

objects and the tactility and visibility of medieval devotion. This emphasis is not wrong. It mattered to nuns to think that what they gave to the Virgin was a wreath of prayer-flowers just as it mattered to wear on earth a crown of white silk that signaled a special place already reserved in heaven. The power of objects was at the center of late-medieval piety. At its very heart lay the assumption that part contains whole and vice versa; that past, present, and future each not merely mirror but contain the other. Without this, there cannot be hope of the salvation of the soul and the resurrection of the body. Such assumptions made the crowns of statues and the crowns of nuns both transient and permanent, both earthly and heavenly. Just as Mary was understood to be delighted and obligated by the goldsmith's crown, so the young nun was bound and molded for heaven by her white silk crown. In a sense, her crown, won by her perpetual virginity, *is* the crown of the Madonna. Confiscation of it or of Mary's crown is a threat to the nun's monastic identity.

Nonetheless we should be careful about taking such assumptions too literally, lest we fall back into the description of late-medieval piety as static and quantitative that is often attributed to Johan Huizinga.⁶⁴ Medieval nuns may not all have thought in the sophisticated terms voiced by Gertrude of Helfta when she quoted a text attributed to Hugh of St. Victor, but they were all aware of the temptations of daily life and the depredations of time that consume objects. Gertrude, or the nun recording her visions, argues that invisible things cannot be understood without visible images. Thus we need "images of milk and honey," just as the Apocalypse of John tells us that the heavenly Jerusalem is "adorned with gold and silver and pearls and other kinds of gems." But "we know that there is nothing of this sort there, where however there is nothing lacking. For if no such things are there in outward appearance [*per speciem*], they are all there in likeness [*per similitudinem*]."⁶⁵ Hence neither the nun's earthly crown nor the crown stolen from the enthroned Madonna *is* Mary's crown in heaven.

Whether or not they quoted such abstract theories of presence and representation, the nuns of the Lüneburg Heath thought in terms of two

64. Johan Huizinga, *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*, trans. Rodney J. Payton and Ulrich Mammitzsch (first Dutch ed. 1919; Chicago, 1996).

65. Gertrude, *Legatus* 1.1, pp. 10–11. A translator of the work, whose translation of the passage in question differs from mine, reports that she has found no work by Hugh of St. Victor to which the author might refer here. Gertrude, *The Herald of Divine Love* 1.1, trans. Margaret Winkworth (New York and Mahwah, 1993), p. 89 n. 8. Gertrude, *Oeuvres spirituelles 2: Le Héraut, livres 1–2* 1.1, ed. Pierre Doyère [Sources chrétiennes 139], (Paris, 1968), pp. 126–27, gives no reference.

espousals, earthly and heavenly, and saw a deep as well as a literal significance in their crowns. Crowns mattered as objects but not only as literal objects. In the liturgy and in inner devotion, nuns and their statues were “crowned with many crowns.” Proleptically and processually, the crowns of earth were and were not the crowns of the eternal Jerusalem. But it mattered that they were crowns.⁶⁶ Understanding the many crowns of fifteenth-century piety and practice helps us understand a little better why the Wienhausen nuns, who tried to model themselves on the Mary crowned in heaven, felt spiritual as well as economic deprivation when her crowns were confiscated in the 1469 reform.

66. It is worth underlining the importance given to glory, heavenly marriage, and resurrection in the piety of north German convents, especially at Wienhausen with its numerous depictions—in glass, wall paintings, sculpture, and small devotional images—of the risen Christ. See Appuhn, “Der Auferstandene.” The emphasis in much of the scholarly literature on suffering, violence, and pain in late-medieval spirituality is, at least for these houses, considerably overdone.