

Mitteldinge: Lutheran churches with their equipment of the 16th century – a history of the material culture.

Summary

What do you think are things about, if they to be named 'Mitteldinge'? Are they *adiaphora*? Not necessary but not harmful? *Vetus, sed utilis? Antiquus?* Or are they just things? For culture-historians especially these belong to those things which, *per definitionem*, have certain characteristics as words, writings, pictures and objects. But what of their function, meaning and context of its framework conditions nowadays makes them to monuments? And what happened in times between? How did changes worked on things? What about particularly the ritual changes in times of Reformation? What is their 'afterlife' (survival) as a Lutheran concept is about since the first century of the Reformation?

For a culture-(and art-)historian like me, medieval works of ecclesiastical architecture and their furnishings are mainly considered monuments, material witnesses to history. As such, they are containers of objective knowledge. In reference to their material culture primarily, this knowledge is knowledge of both an earlier and a continued processuality. It is knowledge of operationalisation of active appropriation in general, but now in times of ritual changes and still continuing. For the historical disciplines and of practical theology, and above all likewise of heritage management and conservation science, as actors with direct influence upon the object, the knowledge of those monuments is significant. But it has been unavailable to date in its required depth and interdisciplinary breadth. What is more, the concept of the *monumentum*, determined by conservation professionals to mean "historical original", has so far restricted access to the functional and contextual capacities of things with all of their thematic and causal assets these have accumulated over centuries of existence.

The well-known Hanoverian Lawyer Ludolf Hugo wrote in his 1661 published dissertation: "Because the ceremonies are signs of things, and the changing of the ceremonies is an indication of the change of things; for their appearance and also for their constituent functions and their respective relations with their actors, those directly acting on the material"¹. So especially in times of ritual changes things worked in a greater number of ways: they might be media with hermeneutical relevance and ritual significance; means of justification, historical self-assurance, signs of denominations; instruments of intangible rituals; they are notably objects in dealing between religious and material-cultural practices. Because of this, when gathering the "knowledge of things", it is essential that the work is cross-genre. This involves a systematic analysis of churches with their equipment, their images, their printed products, as their pre-Lutheran books and libraries too, all as conductors of the developments of those changes. From a combined twofold art-historical as well as artistic-historical position I've been analyzed my material as a document, that reveals its temporal form in the spectrum of its respective patterns of ritual use, interpretation, and preservation, which furthermore qualifies these things as media of its material culture.

So the findings arising from the following study are to be interrogated on this (technical and intellectual) indication of changes in its history: The change as a moment of material-cultural discontinuation, taking the period of the Lutheran Reformation as constitutive. In an 'archaeological window' of that time, histological layers become visible, as do the different meanings of things (within ceremonies), thing- and people-place-networks. The investigation of object-borne clues and comparative criticism of sources also ask questions of those who were adapting and manipulating them, especially with regard to their ritual, theological or individual backgrounds and intentions in the 16th century. Ever since then, things (singing and ceremonies included) have been generally considered "adiaphora", Mitteldinge.

¹ Ludolf Hugo, *De statu regionum Germaniae*, Helmstedt 1661, c. IV, § XVI.

In an interdisciplinary approach I've been decoded the materiality as visible traces of its post-reformal processuality. I setted the things (such as buildings, with their equipment of baptisms, pulpits, retables, textiles, bells, books) in their own histological and developmental continuum, embedded in their cultural practical traditions and breaks. In this way, forms and concepts in dealing become referential in their Lutheran-ecclesiastical evidence and unfold new aesthetical, theological, philosophical, and art historical perspectives of Mitteldinge in the light of today's discourses between use and preservation. So Mitteldinge become furthermore a number of functional relevance and significance in their new theological, ritual and socio-cultural conditions, where inherited things had to be adapted. So things (singing and ceremonies included) were, so to speak, generally 'translated' in new cultural forms and systems. And indeed: Mitteldinge were repeatedly translated and re-translated, they were adapted, obliterated and materially "revived". But always they were arranged in new networks of meaning and catenations of purpose until well into the 19th century, which continues up to this day.

The notion of translation and adaptation of objects can be compared with the translation of words into another language. Their thematic and causal affinities are both obliquely and overtly linked to locally active agents and protagonists. Thus, this study is alert to the existence of far-reaching many-branched personal networks which take Wittenberg as their starting point. In this respect, it does not assume a territorial area of investigation as much as work with Lutheran confessional influence and the notion that there are matrixes of interpretation and reception there of. The region of investigation is therefore understood as a space of cultural transfer. In an excursus, dealing with the Lutheran communal singing, as well as with various media and with books, this space manifests itself as an overarching web of material-cultural developments and changes of mobility and communicability, which stretches across the Lutheran territories and the imperial cities of the old Holy Roman Empire, and takes in the regions of Prussia, Scandinavia and other peripheral zones such as Saxony of Siebenbürgen.

In that scope of investigation, examples of individual and Lutheran confessional demarcation and representation in the first 100 years of the Reformation will be discussed, where these can be read in artistic architectural changes or inscriptions, or perceived in the way that objects and sites have been preserved and employed as actively appropriated forms. From within the midst of their history of meaning and use, Mitteldinge reveal the particular thing-meanings, thing-networks, functions and interdependencies that have ensured the survival of their substance down the centuries. This gives Mitteldinge the status of comparative objects of a still evolving material culture. With all of the breaks and continuities in their operational history, such objects become key to their respective eras. They become material witness to historical activity. Their pronouncements provide a corrective to notions of an early modern ecclesiastical world of things, particularly in the context of the Lutheran Protestant tradition, which themselves have shaped reifications of intangible culture, for instance in music, art and literature, since the 18th and early 19th centuries.

The work in hand serves as an interdisciplinary proposal for discussion about 'things in times of ritual changes'. It is also a re-examination of established modes of thinking and ways of dealing with the preservation of "stuff" for cultural, art and conservation professionals. But, for the people of today, it also supports the aim of unlocking Mitteldinge as examples of the tangible and intangible cultural heritage, as a concept of *monumenta vitalis* for use in the appreciation of art and parish life, exploiting their cultural knowledge, and inspiring reflective learning as well as, ultimately, a new respect and sensuality regarding preserving for the next generations.