

Summaries

hæc pictura completa fuit

On Wall Paintings and Frames

By Axel Bolvig

The caption or another linguistic statement try to bind the visual messages. So is the situation in modern society (cf. Roland Barthes). But medieval imagery does communicate on its own without a linguistic »ancrage«. It is due to a well-developed iconography. It leads to the question, what is an image? After the development of oil painting, woodcut and other kinds of portable images we can answer, an image is what is within the frame. Dealing with wall paintings we face the problem that most subjects have no frame. In a Romanesque decoration the extension of the wall can be perceived as the frame of several individual subjects. The totally painted background does also serve as a pictorial markation. In a vaulted late medieval church we find paintings all over the church. The white background of the individual subjects does not constitute a framing, on the contrary there is no difference between the white background of depicted subjects and the whitewashed surface of the rest of the church. Consequently the church building constitutes the frame and all the individual subjects are to be perceived as one image. This is in accordance with the understanding of medieval paint-

ers. All the survived inscriptions about decorations use the word *pictura* in the singular form. Even the complete decoration of Bellinge church is defined as one picture. Especially after the invention of photography we are used to a fragmented representation of medieval wall paintings, which in a way is a violation towards medieval perception. But a still more detailed fragmentation is necessary to do research in the paintings. The image database with Danish wall paintings at www.kalkmalerier.dk contains at the time of the writing of this article more than 5.000 pictures and it is a useful tool for research, which could never be done by visits to the churches spread all over the country. And by help of IT we now can make 3D programmes offering a virtual church interior where all the fragmented subjects are combined to one *pictura*.

Are they alternative – the different Images?

Grotesque Imagery in the Danish Medieval Wall Paintings: anti- or Commentary Images!

By Steen Schjødt Christensen

Are they alternative the different images? And what does it mean that something is alternative or different? These are some of the questions evoked by a

group of motifs in the Danish Medieval Wall paintings. The motifs are the so-called grotesque or anti-iconography pictures. Images showing obscenities, mocking and grimacing faces, people dancing and demonstrating uncontrolled behaviour, fable-creatures and strange beings that seems to belong to a whole different world. These images form a neglected group of motifs – especially among art historians, since they are not properly registered in the existing iconographic indexes of Danish wall paintings. Above I have tried, to look at the motifs differently by indicating that they were not just characterized by negative meanings. This means that the grotesque and the sacred, the earthly and the heavenly were not always contrasts, but together formed a symbiosis within the world of Christian imagery. The grotesque images have traditionally been understood as symbols of the vices that are as moralising images contrasting the religious ones. But when seen in connection with the religious images it seems likely that the grotesques were part of interplay and not contrasting with the religious imagery. This was obvious in The Last Supper in Smørum where the secular and the religious images refer to the same things – that was the Eucharist and the Easter ceremonies. And as well in Nørre Herlev and Vigersted were games and juggling was not necessarily in contrast with the holy legend of St. Nicolas. And finally in Sæby church, where the open mouth was not negative, but on the contrary was a part of the propagation of Christian teachings. So perhaps the alternative images are not the different ones?

The Beer or the Idea?

On the Understanding of Crookedness in Danish Medieval Art

By Poul Grindler-Hansen

Should iconographical crookedness be explained as the result of beer and blunders or as intentional expressions of ideas? Blunders may be a possibility, but I think that you should always look first for the ideas – at least when you talk of art in a religious sphere. The essay considers some examples from Danish wall paintings and altarpieces. Fig. 1 shows how the painter has become aware of an iconographical mistake and has tried to correct it with an inscription. Figs. 2-4 are examples where a mixture of different iconographical themes was probably intended to enrich the pictorial statement. A golden retable (fig. 5) only representing 10 out of 12 Apostles – yet giving all names in the inscriptions – is probably the result of some practical problem, while the strange, yet original order of the reliefs in fig. 6 must have some, as yet unsolved iconological significance.

Figs. 7-10 depict an altarpiece, which was imported from Northern Germany in separated parts and was put together -wrongly -, in Denmark, in spite of careful numberings and marks made by the German carpenters. It was ordered and erected as an altar for the Scottish community of Elsinore dedicated to the Scottish national saint Ninian, yet the order of the pictures is – and has always been – highly confusing. It is rather frustrating to us as researchers that an altarpiece could apparently be used without much care for the iconographical sense. The reason is, probably, that the Scots in Elsinore chose to stress other aspects

of the iconography than the German producers had expected. It seems that they concentrated on the first and finest position of the triptych with its carved figures, using also the wing with a painting of St. Ninian giving alms, which the German workshop had really intended for the closed, third position of the triptych. The triptych may thus only have been used in its open position.

Lastly the so-called primitive wall paintings of the late Middle Ages are discussed. These should not, as has sometimes been the case, be considered as casual, more or less popular and controversial, almost anti-clerical decorations. Their simple, yet decorative ornaments and symbols stress the lines of the newly erected vaults of the churches and should probably be understood as the final touch given by the masons to complete the work. Their paintings have been found in many churches covering all aspects of society from village churches to monasteries. They are not as a rule to be seen as drunken jokes but as serious pictorial statements. Which not goes to say that feasts and fun could not be a part of it all.

Symbolic facial positions

By Ulla Haastrup

A value-laden symbolic imagery was used for at least 500 years in the wall paintings in Denmark. From the end of the 11th century until the start of the 16th century, faces were only painted in three positions. The most common was the three-quarters face, which was used for the majority of the people in the motifs. Full profile was a little rarer, evil individuals were painted in profile, and toward the end of the Middle Ages, grotesque figures were painted in this way as

well. The most important facial position – used for the divine – was the frontal full-face or »en face«. Up until the 14th century, it was only used for God and Christ in Majestas-like motifs and usually it would be painted in the East/West axis of the church. Later on full-face would also be used for mockery faces and grotesque figures as an insult to the divine, the world turned upside down.

This traditional symbolic system is of course in no way similar to the real world, as little as the ancient Egyptian art of using the profile in all situations is. We all experience in our daily life and in movies that people move around, so their faces are constantly viewed from new angles and perspectives. If two people are talking, they usually face each other in profile, other people walk and sit in three-quarters face or are viewed from behind.

One way of showing faces from the Middle Ages still lives on in the 21st century. An example could be when the TV-speaker speaks to the viewers. When he/she reads aloud, it is common to see the speaker full-face. If the wrong camera is on, it is very common that the speaker apologize to the audience for being in a wrong position, three-quarters face or profile. Then the correct camera shows the speaker en face. The symbol of full-face is here neutral; the speaker does not represent his/her own words or opinions. The »en face« is no longer a symbol of the divine.

Around 1960 I described, in my master's degree thesis in history of art, the late-gothic wall painting workshop, »Isefjordsværkstedet«, how the simple painters – who did not paint the facial features as emotional expressions – used the three facial systems as a significant symbolic sign. To sum it up: Full-face is the divine, three-quarters face the generalized posture of

the head of the ordinary neutral person and profile is symbolizing the evil person. This issue has been an interest to me for many years since then, and in 1999 I published an article claiming the importance of the use of these positions of the faces and the symbolic meaning in the presentations of the Jews in the Danish art in the Middle Ages.

To clarify the three facial positions in Danish wall paintings more concrete and statistically, I have analyzed seven Danish churches with big decorations. Full-face is unusually frequent in the Romanesque church of Måløv, because the meander frieze includes several icon looking half figures in full-face. In the church of Skive, 1522, the symbolic system has been broken, so that both »en face« and profile are used for saints. The five other monuments show the main trend.

Facial positions	Full-face	Three-quarters	Profile	All
Church of Raasted about 1125	1	63	1	65
Church of Måløv about 1150	13	28	0	41
Church of Skibby about 1325	6	90	7	103
Church of Kongsted about 1425	2	87	1	90
Church of Mørkøv 1460-1480	2	148	24	174
Church of Elmelunde 1499-150	3	86	2	91
Church of Skive 1522	6	80	8	94

Monks and Nuns on Danish Church Walls

Some Reflections on the Carmelite Monks in Sæby Church

By Kaare Rübner Jørgensen

In the still existing medieval churches of Denmark murals of monks and nuns are very rare. Therefore, the former Carmelite church of Sæby in Northern Jutland with its twenty-four friars is unique. As some of the paintings and many of the ribbons, which once identified the depicted Carmelites, are rather mutilated, visitors are no longer able to identify more than fourteen of the twenty-four friars. However, a book, written by a German abbot John Trithemius in 1492, contained a catalogue of 75 outstanding Carmelites. As this catalogue can be shown to have been the source of the ribbons, it is possible not only to fill the textual gaps, but also to identify twenty-three of the twenty-four friars.

These friars, praised for their wisdom and skill in Theology, belonged to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and have been dead in hundred or more years, when the paintings were made on the vaults of the church (1512-1523). Their wisdom was therefore neither new nor modern, but represented a traditional scholastic learning.

At the time of the painting, however, the East-Danish Carmelites, especially those living in the friary of Elsinore or studying at the University of Copenhagen, became strongly influenced by Erasmus of Rotterdam and his Biblical Humanism. The author therefore proposes that the murals in Sæby should be seen as a reaction to this modern tendency in Theology. If such an interpretation is acceptable, the paint-

ing of the friars in the church of Sæby is evidence of a hitherto unknown controversy among the Danish Carmelites on the Eve of the Reformation. Consequently, the murals thus get a quite new significance.

The Concept of Labour in the Danish Medieval Wall Paintings

By Martin Bo Nørregaard

This article examines the perception of manual labour through the late medieval wall paintings preserved in the Danish churches. The written sources concerning the attitude towards manual labour in medieval Denmark are very scarce, and most likely only reflect how manual labour was seen by the elite. Almost nothing is known about how the major part of the population perceived the manual labour which was their daily lot – neither in Denmark nor in the rest of Europe. In view of the lack of written sources it seems logical to try to use the richness of medieval wall paintings that are preserved in the Danish churches to shed some light on the concept of labour in Denmark. It is even possible that the wall paintings to some degree reflect the view of those who laboured manually, as a number of things indicate that they began to visit the churches more often and in greater numbers as well as to influence the design of the churches in the later part of the Danish Middle Ages. There are many different depictions of manual labour on the walls and vaults of the Danish churches, but the most common is Adam and Eves Life on Earth. From late-medieval times this motive is preserved in 31 churches. Through a quantitative analysis it is examined whether the depiction of

Adam and Eves Life on Earth differs from the text of the Bible or not, and if some interesting patterns can be found. The Bible only mentions that Adam has to work the cursed earth in the sweat of his face, and it is therefore striking that Adam in almost half of the churches is ploughing. The plough being the biggest and most valuable tool the peasants possessed and therefore implying a certain amount of wealth, indicating a positive view on manual labour. The clothes of Adam and Eves point in the same direction, in almost all of the 31 churches their clothes are depicted as average on a level between the clothes of the two extremes in *The Prayer of the Rich and the Poor*. It is however difficult to reach any definite conclusion on the perception of manual labour in the Danish wall paintings. The preserved wall paintings are too few in numbers and too little is known about the situation in which they were created. Who ordered and paid for them? How large a degree of freedom did the painter possess and how did he perceive himself, did he think himself as belonging to those who did manual labour and in which way did it affect his view on the peasantry which he depicted in Adam and Eves Life on Earth? Can his way of depicting be at all seen as more than an aesthetical choice?

Children and Animals in Danish Wall Paintings

By Rikke Agnete Olsen

Children and animals in Danish medieval wall-paintings show how the range of themes in the paintings and certainly elsewhere also represented by children and animals is very wide. Accordingly the mental ho-

rizon in the period must have been wide also. The church would never paint anything that was not publicly understood. The church must have decided what to paint, as it could not have accepted anything crossing its content. Pictures obviously critical of the church must reflect the division of the church.

The Influence of Deterioration and Restoration on the al State of Wall Paintings

By Kirsten Trampedach

The medieval wall paintings in Danish churches have changed substantially from the time they were created. These changes have had an important influence on the way the paintings are perceived today and have been caused by different factors: the technique of the paintings, the decomposition of materials and the action of the surrounding climate. Compounding these factors are the interventions of conservators during the last 150 years. Throughout this period various different attitudes pertaining to the conservation/restoration of the paintings have developed.

The paintings were executed in a mixed technique, consisting of fresco and secco phase. Quite a number had been initially carried out on a wet ground (lime wash), due to which a fresco effect was achieved, but most frequently the paintings had been created or finished in secco with lime or organic binders (egg, skin-glue or oil-based binders). Areas painted in a fresco technique are best preserved, which means that often the visual impression is dominated by red and yellow ochres. Black outlines are missing, pigments are lost and pigments have decomposed – as, for instance, red lead or cinnabar, which change into a black/

brown colour, or the blue azurite, which changes into a green copper chloride.

The influence of conservators can be seen in restorations carried out from the middle of the nineteenth century until today. In earlier times the greatest importance was attached to the iconographic content, and, as a consequence, the motives were repainted and reconstructed. The conservator of today is much more cautious. Conservation of the material substance is prioritised and retouching is kept to a minimum, and is not executed on original paint layer or ground. Sometimes, however, compromises must be accepted to make the paintings legible, but reconstruction/retouches are always distinguishable from the original.

Preserving wall paintings is a compromise, as the conservator must comply with the demands of the congregation who has the responsibility of the church and its use. This fact can impart severe stress to the wall paintings, due to unfavourable climatic conditions, which are particularly responsible for the deterioration of the paintings. If serious attention is not paid to preventive measures we might one day have to repeat the actions of the past and cover the paintings, this time in order to preserve them for the future!

Can the Devil be Classified?

By Annedorte Vad

The medieval wall paintings are a vast source of information on the ideas and thinking of the medieval man. To use the images as a source to the past it is necessary to view the images as a whole. That can

be done using image databases where the images are classified according to their content. The Internet and image databases give the viewer of today the possibility to see millions of images with hundreds of years apart and from a vast geographical area at the same time on a computer. That opens up for comparing and analysing the content.

Classification of images traditionally has its roots in written material and several aspects of the image content is never recorded or classified. The devil is one of those. This article shows how it is possible to find the devil in the wall paintings and subsequently describing him and saying some things about the mentality behind the representation.