

Reliquary statue of Ste Foy according to Aby Warburg and Hans Belting

The reliquary statue of Ste Foy in Conques is believed to be the oldest surviving three-dimensional sculpture in medieval Christian art.¹ The core of the saint's enthroned figure is made of wood and completely covered with gold and precious stones of all kinds. However, the head of the statue, which contains the piece of Ste Foys skull, is a fourth century imperial golden bust.² The original half figure with a bust was probably created around the year 883, when Ste Foy was called the patron of the abbey church in Conques. The enthroned full figure with a crown is dated around the year 1000.

The reliquary statue mesmerizes the viewers for centuries. The statue is 90 cm high and entirely embellished with precious materials. There are even earrings hanging from its ears. Even more than gold and gems, the worshipper is struck by Foys life-like gaze. The huge eyes are inlaid with Irises and they are original with the bust. The saint sits on a throne in a very strict and stiff pose and her look does not remind a young girl, which Ste Foy according to the legend definitely was. Not only that the statue's gender is hard to recognize, its facial features are not girly at all. The original bust depicted an adult man and was reused without being modified in any way. The oval face with very thin lips, long and angular nose and big shining eyes – those are the features of pagan idols, emperors and later modern dictators.³ Maybe this is also one of the reasons why the cult of Ste Foy was so immensely popular in the Middle Ages and why it attracts so much attention from contemporary researchers.

The cult of Ste Foy was immensely popular in the eleventh century, even though the saint herself was relatively unknown for a very long time. Ste Foy was an Early Christian martyr – daughter of a patrician from Agen converted to Christianity as a young girl and martyred under Maximians persecution between 286–288. The relics of the saint were stolen by the monk named Ariviscus from the monastery in Agen and transferred to Conques in the mid-ninth century.⁴ The presence of relics in Conques attracted pilgrims and rich donors. Soon rumors about the miraculous power of the saint started to spread in the region. Between the years 1013 and 1025, Bernard of Angers was invited to Conques to report the miracles of Ste

¹ Beate Fricke, *Fallen Idols - Risen Saints* (Turnhout: Brepols 2015), 25.

² Fricke, *Fallen Idols*, 32.

³ Ivan Foletti, *Jupiter, Kristus, Chalifa* (Brno: Books & Pipes 2019).

⁴ *The Book of Sainte Foy*, trans. Pamela Sheingorn (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 1995), 263–274.

Foy. The result was an outstanding book in four parts – *Liber miraculorum sancte Fidis*. The book represents Ste Foy as a mediator with the divine, patron saint and protector, as well as a child-like character. The worshiper could thus develop almost an intimate relationship with her. It serves not only as a text of personal devotion, but mostly as a promotional text, which was supposed to spread the popularity of the saint's cult.⁵ The book disseminated the stories of Foy's miracles in northern France. Soon, pilgrims made Conques the goal of their journeys. In the eleventh century, Conques became the obligatory stop on the pilgrimage to Compostela.⁶

The *Liber Miraculorum* is much more than just another book of miracles. It contains remarkable information about the socio-political organization of eleventh century society in Conques. But more importantly, the *Liber* gives the most precious record of the saint's role in the lives of worshipers and the way Ste Foy and her reliquary were perceived by medieval people. The most striking record is given by Bernard himself. The monk describes, how he was full of superstition and mistrust when first seeing the statue like the one of Ste Foy:

For in fact there is an established usage, an ancient custom, in the whole country of Auvergne, the Rouergue, and the Toulousian as well as in the surrounding areas, that people erect a statue for their own saint, of gold or silver or some other metal, in which the head of the saint or a rather important part of the body is reverently preserved. To learned people this may seem to be full of superstition, if not unlawful, for it seems as if the rites of the gods of ancient cultures, or rather the rites of demons, are being observed. And I was no less foolish, for I also thought this practice seemed perverse and quite contrary to Christian law when for the first time I examined the statue of Saint Gerald placed above the altar, gloriously fashioned out of the purest gold and the most precious stones. It was an image made with such a precision to the face of the human form that it seemed to see with its attentive, observant gaze the great many peasants seeing it and to gently grant with its reflecting eyes the prayers of those praying before it. And soon, smiling at my companion, Bernier – to my shame – I burst forth in Latin with this opinion: “Brother, what do you think of this idol? Would Jupiter or Mars consider himself unworthy of such a statue?”⁷

Barnard later adds that afterwards he was very sorry for his doubts, saying that “the holy image is consulted not as an idol that requires sacrifices, but because it commemorates the martyr”.⁸ However, it is not entirely true that the statue does not require sacrifices. The *Liber*

⁵ Kathleen Ashley, Pamela Sheingorn, “An Unsentimental View of Ritual in the Middle Ages Or, Sainte Foy was no Snow White,” *Journal of Ritual Studies* 6, no.1 (1992): 66.

⁶ *The Book of Sainte Foy*, 11–12.

⁷ *The Book of Sainte Foy*, 77.

⁸ *The Book of Sainte Foy*, 78.

miraculorum is full of episodes, when Ste Foy enters peoples dreams and requires candles, gold or jewelry in exchange for miracles. And people obey her instructions and place their most precious possessions in front of her altar.⁹ Moreover, the saint's behaviour resembles very much the behaviour of ancient gods. Ste Foy is playful when performing miracles. Bernard even states that believers call some of them *joca*, which means jokes.¹⁰ She is sometimes spoiled and revengeful in her way. For example, when a girl who was previously healed by the saint ignored the precession with a reliquary. The girl was punished by Ste Foy, because she “had shown arrogant disdain for the saint” and her illness immediately reoccurred.¹¹ When rewarding, Ste Foy enters people's dreams in the form of a young girl in a beautiful golden dress. But when admonishing or reproaching, she appears in the form of her reliquary statue – strict and powerful. Moreover, the statue was carried in the procession in order to perform miracles, but also to represent its power. Bernard describes a few occasions, during which the statue was paraded for solely secular purposes. Once the reliquary was carried to the place of mob riot to repress the disorder.¹² Another time it was carried to the land which had been donated to the monastery, but the family of the donor disputed the monk's claim. By that act was the land proclaimed property of Ste Foy.¹³ This interaction between the saint and the folk resembles very much the ancient religious customs. Roman and Greek gods, as well as Ste Foy constantly interfere in human lives and act not as much as a mediator, but rather as an executor of God's power.

To sum it up, it is clear that the phenomenon of Ste Foy deserves complex examination. The golden statue of a very specific human form which contains sacred relics and is venerated and adorned has a prominent place in eleventh-century Christianity. Not only its materiality, but also the ritual practice with the statue is very similar to that of ancient Romans and Greeks. My task in this essay is not to resolve this problem, but rather to examine the phenomenon, using the work of those more competent for this task. I would like to test the ideas of Aby Warburg (1866–1929) and Hans Belting (1935), by applying them on the reliquary statue of Ste Foy. Thus, the following sections of this essay will be designated for this task.

⁹ Ashley, Sheingorn “An Unsentimental View,” 73.

¹⁰ Ashley, Sheingorn “An Unsentimental View,” 69.

¹¹ *The Book of Sainte Foy*, 80.

¹² *The Book of Sainte Foy*, 204.

¹³ *The Book of Sainte Foy*, 120.

Aby Warburg

The work of Aby Warburg has experienced a big revival in recent years. While during his life the scholar was rather in seclusion and almost forgotten after his death, the institute and library bearing his name are now one of the key institutions of modern Art History. The reason for that is certainly Warburg's original methodology and progressive ideas, which have found their audience only in the second half of the twentieth century.¹⁴ According to Warburg, the works of art should be regarded less within the philosophical categories of aesthetics than as a part of psychology.¹⁵ Applying this approach, History of Art would become a study of behaviour and thinking of people in history.

Aby Warburg occupied himself primarily with the art of Italian Renaissance. Medieval art stood on the margin of his research; actually, the entire Middle Ages are perceived by Warburg as a transitional period. The ancient forms that he was so interested in, were preserved during the Middle Ages by means of astrology.¹⁶ However, it is clear that medieval art was not set aside in Warburg's research, even though according to Warburg's own words: "Every age has the renaissance of antiquity that it deserves".¹⁷ This superstition is not surprising in the nineteenth century scholarship. Medieval studies were mostly nationalistic in their motivation. The renaissance, on the other hand, was full of romantic and idealistic ideas and "offered itself as a screen for the projection of our wishes and fears".¹⁸ The question thus sounds: How can the phenomenon of Ste Foy be explained, using Warburg's approach?

Survival of ancient forms

Aby Warburg was most interested in the transition of ancient forms from Antiquity up to nowadays. In his essay on the astrological program of the Palazzo Schifanoia in Ferrara Warburg formulated what he called 'historical psychology of human expression' or 'pathos formulas'.¹⁹ The scholar saw the traces of a 'religious being' inside humans especially in expressive movement and gestures of depicted figures. He was able to identify an echo of

¹⁴ Michael Diers, Thomas Girst, Dorothea von Moltke, "Warburg and the Warburgian Tradition of Cultural History," *New German Critique* 65, (Spring - Summer 1995): 59.

¹⁵ Warburg, Forster 1999, p. 6.

¹⁶ Warburg, Martinkovičová 2009, p. 396.

¹⁷ Aby Warburg, *Renewal of Pagan Antiquity: Contribution to the Cultural History of the European Renaissance*, introd. Kurt W. Forster, (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1999), 6.

¹⁸ Warburg, *Renewal of Pagan Antiquity*, 3.

¹⁹ Carolina Van Eyck, *Art, Agency and Living Presence: From the Animated Image to the Excessive Object* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2015), 179.

extreme devotion in an artistic depiction of actions like walking, running and dancing, that results from an impact of extreme emotions. Its investigation was based on a polar theory of culture, that every cultural fact or artefact is ultimately a psychological and embodied compromise between magical defence mechanisms and rational control of affects.²⁰ Using Warburg's words:

It is in the area of mass orgiastic seizure that one should seek the mint that stamps the expressive forms of extreme inner possession on the memory with such intensity—inasmuch as it can be expressed through gesture—that these engrams of affective experience survive in the form of a heritage preserved in the memory. They serve as models that shape the outline drawn by the artist's hand.²¹

According to Warburg, the pathos formulas were stored in a collective memory of humankind and unconsciously penetrated into the art of all epochs. He called it *Nachleben*, which means afterlife of forms. It was Warburg's life-long effort to trace them down. However, it was the last years of his life, during which he fully devoted himself to this task. In his institute, Warburg pinned around one thousand images to more than sixty panels in what seemed to be random order. What he actually created was a map of the Renaissance roots in ancient Greece and Rome.²² He called this project *Mnemosyne atlas*, according to the Greek goddess of memory, mother of all nine muses.

The 'pathos formulas' are the facial and bodily expressions and gestures, which transfer extreme emotions like those of religious devotion. Since Warburg occupied himself primarily with the art of Renaissance, he traced those formulas in movement and flowy draperies. But the sitting enthroned figure, with a strict facial expression and fixed gaze is certainly an expression of extreme emotion as well. Since Antiquity this form is reserved for emperors; like for example the Colossus of Constantine dated to the beginning of the fourth century. This monumental statue, today preserved only in fragments, once represented a sitting enthroned emperor, executed in a rather abstract style, with a very angular frontal face and excessive eyes.²³ This is a pose of power and it naturally attracts attention. There is no coincidence that such a pose was reserved to Christ and is nowadays used to depict God the Father. And not by chance, the same features can be observed on the reliquary statue of Ste

²⁰ Van Eyck, *Art, Agency and Living Presence*, 179.

²¹ Aby Warburg, "The Absorption of the Expressive Values of the Past, translated by Matthew Rampley." *Art in Translation* 1, no.2 (2009): 278.

²² Warburg, "The Absorption," 281.

²³ Kurt Weitzman ed., *Age of Spirituality. Late Antique and Early Christian Art, Third to Seventh Century* (New York: Princeton University Press, 1979), 8–35.

Foy. Moreover, not only is the statue of Ste Foy executed in an ancient form, but also the head of the statue is a fourth century spolia. Then, if we are speaking about the afterlife of ancient forms, in the case of Ste Foy it is literal.

The serpent ritual

Another Warburgs text, which I want to mention, was not originally intended for the wider public or scholarly community. It is a lecture given at the sanitary at Kreuzlingen, where Warburg was recovering from a mental breakdown. After two years of treatment his condition improved and the given lecture served as a proof of his restored mind. During his talk about the primitive culture of Pueblo tribes, Warburg demonstrated his art historical theories, which can be traced in all his work, but were never before formulated so explicitly.²⁴ In his research, he worked with evolutionary theory as most of his contemporaries, but also with the latest anthropological studies and especially with the anthropology of religion.²⁵ This is clearly manifested in the lecture when deciphering the symbol of a snake as a universal sign, used throughout history and cultures. While comparing the meaning of a snake in ancient culture with its meaning in the culture of Pueblo tribes, Warburg found many common features and even an identical legend which accompanies the serpent ritual in both cases.²⁶ The veneration of a snake is according to Warburg an anthropological need which can be traced across cultures. The religiosity to Warburg was natural to every human being and served as a carrier of artistic forms. Warburg thus suggests that primitive customs like the one of Pueblo tribes and the ancient pagan culture, preserved in the entire European culture as we know it. However, the meaning of that ancient custom does not remain constant – it transforms in time and space and serves as a kind of barometer.²⁷ Snakes for Warburg represent the cause of all things, but while in christianity the cause is purely symbolic, for primitive tribes it was literal. That is how Warburg characterizes the ‘bodily’ and ‘imaginary’ symbolism, and snake as a universal and timeless answer to the question of the origin of death and pain in the world.²⁸

²⁴ Aby Warburg, Tereza Martinkovičová, “Hadí rituál: Warburgova kreuzlingenská přednáška, ed. a preklad Tereza Martinkovičová,” *Umění : časopis Ústavu dějin umění Akademie věd České republiky* 57, no. 4 (2009), 385.

²⁵ Warburg, *Renewal of Pagan Antiquity*, 7.

²⁶ Warburg, Martinkovičová, “Hadí rituál,” 393–394.

²⁷ Matthew Rampley, “Aby Warburg: *Kulturwissenschaft*, Judaism and the Politics of Identity,” *Oxford Art Journal* 33, no. 3 (2010): 306.

²⁸ Warburg, Martinkovičová, “Hadí rituál,” 395–397.

Applying this approach to the statue of Ste Foy, it is clear that the religiosity as a carrier of ancient artistic forms did not disappear in the Middle Ages, nor was it preserved only in medieval astrology. Today we know that the Christianity in the Middle Ages used the same tools for liturgical practice as ancient paganism.²⁹ The use of the reliquary statue of Ste Foy serves as a proof of this claim. This practice, however, was not entirely identical to that of ancient religion. Both cultures used the same tools and practiced very similar rituals, but both cultures understood the meaning of their actions in a different way. Ancient Romans and Greeks venerated the golden statue as a deity and thus practiced what Warburg would call 'bodily symbolism'. Medieval Christians, on the other hand, considered the golden statue only as a shrine, through which God performed his miracles. Ste Foy served as a mediator – a channel which connects a man with God.³⁰ Thus, what medieval christians did, was named by Warburg an 'imaginary symbolism'.

However, if we compromise the writings of Bernard of Angers into our equation, the entire problem seems to be much more complicated. Although medieval believers perceived the statue as a shrine which hosted the relics of their intercessor whose power came directly from God, this does not explain the immense power of the statue itself. In the *Liber miraculorum*, the saint appeared in the form of the statue in dreams of those who refused to obey her instructions. The statue with its radiant gaze was carried to the places where power needed to be manifested. Even though theologically the statue was understood in the means of 'imaginary symbolism', practically it was more like 'bodily symbolism'.

Warburg's lecture was not meant to be used as a scholastic theory. It was kind of 'thinking out loud' and the ideas presented there were not yet ready to be tested in a scholarly way. Despite that, it laid the foundations for Art History as we know it today, namely Hans Belting's writings *Likeness and Presence* and *Anthropology of Images*, which brought the whole image study to a new level.³¹

²⁹ Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence. A history of the Image before the Era of Art*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Chicago and London: University Chicago Press, 1994), 11.

³⁰ Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 11.

³¹ Hans Belting, *An Anthropology of Images: Picture, Medium, Body*, trans. Thomas Dunlap (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001), 2.

Hans Belting

Likeness and presence

Hans Belting's book called *Likeness and presence* is entirely devoted to the history of images. The book serves as a guide to the image problem. The image, as Belting understands it, is that of a person. Such an image was treated like a person, being worshiped, despised and carried in the procession; in short, served in the symbolic exchange of power.³² The book is thus directly concerned with images such as that of Ste Foy. The author is convinced that the images reveal their meaning best by their use, but his aim is not to explain the phenomenon of images yet.³³ This will be the aim of another Belting's book, with which I will be dealing in the following section of the essay.

According to Belting there were only two types of images in the Middle Ages: The Holy Images as described above, and narrative images, which served as a substitution for the text. Both types of images stand in opposition to what we today call an Art. The Holy images, like Ste Foy were not holy by their nature, but because they were consecrated. Thus, the priest is a much more important authority than the author of the image, and the image then relinquished its power to the consecrating institution – the Church. Theologically, it was not a problem to depict saints, since they once had a visible body. The problem arose only when images depicted God, but even this problem was resolved by the double nature of God, since the human nature of Jesus could be depicted.³⁴

Anthropology of images

At the end of the eighties of the twentieth century, Hans Belting was working on a book, which was supposed to complete his long lasting interest in visual studies. The book represented the results of an interdisciplinary research group including psychologists, philosophers and of course art historians. However, it was mostly a result of Belting's life-long effort to understand the perception of votive images across epochs in the widest anthropological perspective.³⁵ The book is called *Anthropology of Images* and was published in 2001.

³² Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, xxi.

³³ Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, xxii.

³⁴ Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 7.

³⁵ Ivan Foletti, Ladislav Kesner, "Ikonická přítomnost, doba koronavirová a obrazy bez duše," *Kontexty* 2, (2021): 39.

According to Belting, the art history at the beginning of the twentieth century only came about as the analysis of art works. That is why Warburg sought to turn it into the history of the culture, but his followers again narrowed his ideas to aesthetic questions.³⁶ In his introduction to the book, Belting openly stated that he took up Warburg's anthropology of images and his *Kulturwissenschaft* and appropriated it to our own time.³⁷

At the very beginning Belting distinguishes between an image and picture as one of them is mental and the second a physical representation. The pictures or 'physical images' have a technical or man-made body that catches our eye, while the image rests in our mind. But according to Belting, this dualism represents a false dichotomy, like the one between matter and mind.³⁸ In reality, both pictures and images are crucially dependent on each other, as one can not exist without the other. The interaction between our bodies and those physical images requires, according to Belting, a third parameter – a medium. Thus, "the picture is an image with a medium".³⁹ The medium helps the viewer "to see that the image neither equates with living bodies nor with the lifeless object".⁴⁰ "The image always has a mental quality, the medium always a material one, even if they both form a single entity in our perception".⁴¹ Moreover, also our body serves as a medium. "When external pictures are re-embodied as our own images we substitute for their fabricated medium our own body, which, when it serves in this capacity, turns into a living or natural medium."⁴²

The phenomenon of Ste Foy would be called by Belting an Iconic presence. This terminology was created by Belting to name the act, when the missing body of a dead or imaginary person is replaced by an image. The lost body is replaced by a virtual body which can be also called medium. According to that characterization, images make a physical absence visible by transforming it into an iconic presence.⁴³

Such characterization of images shades a new light on the statue of Ste Foy and resolves the problem of double symbolism emerging with Warburg's theory. In Belting's view the statue of Ste Foy represents a medium. The proper image of Ste Foy is mediated to the viewer via that medium and that is why the statue is abundant in such secular power. The statue is worshiped

³⁶ Belting, *An Anthropology of Images*, 12.

³⁷ Belting, *An Anthropology of Images*, 12.

³⁸ Belting, *An Anthropology of Images*, 15.

³⁹ Belting, *An Anthropology of Images*, 5, 10, 15.

⁴⁰ Belting, *An Anthropology of Images*, 11.

⁴¹ Belting, *An Anthropology of Images*, 20.

⁴² Belting, *An Anthropology of Images*, 16.

⁴³ Belting, *An Anthropology of Images*, 10–11.

as a living person, because it brings an Iconic presence of the saint. Same as a picture of the deceased one has a special value for the owner and the look on it can provoke an emotional response, because it reflects the presence of the deceased person. The monks in Conques were very much aware of such a medium's power. The practice to create a golden reliquary in human form was very common in the eleventh-century Auvergne region.⁴⁴ Simultaneously, this practice indicates the continuity that Warburg was talking about, since the making of images can be traced to the most primitive times in our history. There is this anthropological need to create faces with eyes, to look in the eyes of others.⁴⁵ Actually, in order to be cured by Ste Foy, one also needs to look into her eyes. Belting wrote:

We feel that pictures of people are looking back to us. This exchange of the gaze, normally experienced only by the beholder, becomes a reciprocal experience in the case of a living mask or painted face. Here the image involves – visibly or invisibly – the eyes of the other person who lives behind the image. This experience of the image, in which the beholder's awareness of an answering gaze animates the image, has to be set against the experience of gazing at oneself in a mirror, which involves a different attitude.⁴⁶

Thus, the decision to use a golden statue with a radiant gaze was very effective. No wonder that the popularity of the saint rose so rapidly. Moreover, the medieval believers did not distinguish between the medium and the image. Bernard calls the statue an *image*, meaning a Holy Image. Thus, according to Belting's characterization, it was treated as a living person and the worshiper developed an intimate relationship with it.

Carolina van Eyck & Statue as a living being

“What makes artefacts, including art works, exercise such agency or excessiveness that viewers believe they possess significant characteristics of life”?⁴⁷ This question was posed by Carolina van Eyck in her book *Art, Agency and Living Presence*. The book is a result of a collaborative project between art historians, classicists, historians, literary scholars, archaeologists and anthropologists.⁴⁸ In her book Van Eyck called for a new understanding of images that would deal with the image in the way human beings interact with it. In her book, Van Eyck gives various accounts of viewers attributing the life to the statue or other work of

⁴⁴ *The Book of Sainte Foy*, 77.

⁴⁵ Van Eyck, *Art, Agency and Living Presence*.

⁴⁶ Belting, *An Anthropology of Images*, 24–25.

⁴⁷ Van Eyck, *Art, Agency and Living Presence*, 17.

⁴⁸ Van Eyck, *Art, Agency and Living Presence*, 9.

art. The aim of the book, however, is to contribute towards the understanding of this phenomenon.⁴⁹ In the conclusion of the book the author herself admitted that the problem reached a deadlock. She sees the solution in Warburg's turn to anthropology, ignoring that fifteen years before Hans Belting already solved this problem.⁵⁰ It must be said that Van Eyck devoted her book to early modern sculpture, which was categorized by Belting as Art, not as Image. It might seem that the conclusion deduced by Belting does not relate to her object of study. However, *The Anthropology of Images* deals with depictions from every epoch, even with the contemporary digital media. Despite that, Van Eyck raised some interesting points which I would like to mention in this section.

The inspiration for Van Eyck's book was the classical text, namely Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria*, in which the author analyzes the effect of work of art or speech on the public. Both speech and art are animated by the use of figures. In terms of narration, figure is a change in meaning of language caused by the change in the body's aspect. Orator uses figures specifically to arouse the emotions as the *vultus orationis*, that means 'face of the speech', is a more powerful tool than gestures and expressions alone, since it gives a visible shape to the emotions of the speaker. The same principle is expressed when Cicero calls striking arrangements of words *quasi lumina*, which means almost eyes.⁵¹ The power of speech is by the classics illustrated by having a face and eyes.

By this comparison, Van Eyck suggests that in order to create an impression of life, the statue needs to have a face and eyes. This alone is mostly enough to achieve the required effect. After seeing the statue of Ste Foy 'face to face', I can confirm that its shining eyes truly create an impression of living gaze. However, there are many other tools to support the illusion of life, for example polychromy. In the case of a golden or marble statue, the most effective tool is certainly light. Van Eyck describes how the statue of Paulina Borghese used to be observed by nocturnal viewers using torch light, because "in the flickering light statues seem to move towards the viewer from the dark, and the play of light on the marble suggests living skin".⁵² Ivan Foletti proved that a similar effect can be achieved with the statue of Ste Foy when illuminated with the candle light.⁵³ The statue is emerging from the dark, her

⁴⁹ Van Eyck, *Art, Agency and Living Presence*, 26.

⁵⁰ Although Van Eyck mentioned the contribution of Hans Belting into the problematic (namely she mentioned the book *Bild und Kult*), the *Anthropology of Images* was never mentioned, nor were the ideas presented in the book included in Van Eyck's text.

⁵¹ Van Eyck, *Art, Agency and Living Presence*, 18.

⁵² Van Eyck, *Art, Agency and Living Presence*, 197–198.

⁵³ Video from the experiment can be found online:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pvUcROMWF5g&t=284s&ab_channel=CenterforEarlyMedievalStudies

golden surface reminds of living skin and her eyes shine so excessively, that it creates an impression of a truly living gaze.

The illumination of the abbey church in Conques, where the statue had been stored behind the iron grills, is unknown to us. One can only speculate how well the statue was lit. Considering that the most common votive gift was a candle⁵⁴ and the place behind the iron grills is not illuminated directly by a window, the candle light is a very probable option.

Conclusion

The reliquary statue of Ste Foy can not be understood differently than as Holy Image as defined by Hans Belting. This type of image, according to Belting, should not be studied the same way as renaissance and early modern statues, since they already belong to the different category of objects, which is defined as Art. The Holy Image is by definition an object, which is treated as a person. It is venerated and possesses 'magical' power unlike for example an early modern statue, which is animated mainly by *mimesis*. The Holy Image does not have to be mimetic to be animated, even though in the case of Ste Foy the *mimesis* also plays a significant role.

The act of veneration of Holy Images can also be understood as the continuation of ancient customs as introduced by Aby Warburg in the Kreuzlingen lecture. It is considered as an anthropological need which can be traced to the oldest man-made pictorial representations. While God created a man out of clay and breathed life into it, a man created an image with the same goal - to animate it. Hans Belting introduced a whole terminology and philosophical system, which helps to understand the phenomenon to its core. What a medieval viewer was experiencing near the statue of Ste Foy was by Belting named as 'Iconic Presence'. The statue in its material form is only a medium, via which we are able to experience the image. Simultaneously, our body is also a medium, which receives and creates images. The experience of our body thus changes our perception of the image. The medieval man, who was not surrounded by images as we are today and underwent a pilgrimage to see the statue, must have had a different perception of it than today's tourists in Conques.

Aby Warburg started to look at the works of art as a creation of a human psyche. His turn to psychology and anthropology resulted in Art History as we know it today. Without this fundamental change of thinking, the phenomenon of Holy Images could never be explained

⁵⁴ *The Book of Sainte Foy*, 47.

by Hans Belting. The images like those of Ste Foy, would still be considered only as a result of a decline, following after the great period of Antiquity.

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