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Religious Materiality in the Early Modern World

Edited by

Suzanna Ivanič, Mary Laven and Andrew Morrall

Amsterdam University Press

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Abbreviations

AGN	Archivo General de la Nación
AHC	Archivo Histórico del Cuzco
PN	Protocolos Notariales
AHN	Archivo Histórico Nacional
ASC	Archivio Storico della Santa Casa
ASM	Archivio di Stato di Macerata
ASV	Archivio di Stato di Venezia
PS	Provveditori alla Sanità
b.	busta
exp.	expediente
leg.	legajo

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Introduction

Suzanna Ivanič, Mary Laven and Andrew Morrall

One of the most intriguing objects on display among the 'sacred silver and stained glass' at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London is a fifteenth-century object from northern Italy, believed to be a Jewish spice-box (Fig. I.1). Originally used, as we suppose, during the Havdalah ceremony that marks the end of the Sabbath, the spices within the container were blessed and the box was passed around for all to smell.[1] This olfactory ritual marked the start of the new week. The V&A holds several examples of these distinctive tower-shaped containers but this one is unique in that it is topped with a cross and includes a remnant of red wax; the two unusual adaptations suggest that the container was later repurposed as a Christian reliquary. This radically transformed object with its elusive life history is redolent of the complexity of religious materialities in the early modern world.

Powerful currents of change swept across religious practices and beliefs in Europe and around the globe during the period 1400–1800. That these changes had material manifestations is a familiar idea. It is a commonplace that the Reformation prompted the destruction of religious images in northern Europe, while the Golden Temple at Amritsar was a product of the rise of Sikhism. The 'material turn' in historical studies has led us to question and even invert the model of causation that such narratives imply. Material objects – whether small and portable or the size of a temple or cathedral – have been accorded a more central and active role in accounts of religious change. The goal of this volume is to show how placing objects at the centre of our analysis changes our understanding of early modern religious history.

Bynum and the Study of Religious Materiality

Caroline Walker Bynum's 2011 monograph *Christian Materiality* – the inspiration and the starting point for this volume – suggests a three-point programme for studying religious material culture.

Firstly, materiality must be understood historically. Bynum insists on the importance of returning to 'matter as medieval people confronted it'.[2] This means excavating contemporary categories. Medieval holy matter in particular was vibrant; it was

1 Keen, *Jewish Ritual Art*, 116.

2 Bynum, *Christian Materiality*, 284.

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Fig. I.1 Spice-box. Gilt copper, fifteenth century, northern Italy, Victoria and Albert Museum (M.40&:1-1951)
© Victoria and Albert Museum

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characterized not as animal, vegetable or mineral, but 'as the locus of generation and corruption'.[3] Matter tended to be described by theorists as 'organic, fertile and in some sense alive'.[4] Certain things held intrinsic spiritual significance for their viewers. Bleeding hosts, moving statues and speaking images were each regarded as a 'locus of divine agency'.[5] Moreover, they required physical responses beyond the simple act of viewing, such as touching, kissing or consuming. Expensive precious reliquaries and artefacts had long been a part of medieval Christianity, but the upsurge in 'living holy matter' was a new phenomenon in the late Middle Ages.[6] While Bynum's own focus is on explicitly holy stuff, including relics, sacramentals and devotional images, her approach can be applied to an extended material world including natural materials in the landscape and items not specifically used for religious practice.

Secondly, we need to establish how different materials and aesthetics worked to connect to the divine. In the late Middle Ages, religious objects called attention to their materiality. Rock crystal on a reliquary was not only functional, as a window to see the relic beneath, but also spiritually significant, in encasing the relic in the 'nondecayable quintessence of heaven'.[7] Bynum claims that this artistic mode, which expressly drew attention to stuff, fitted a late medieval theory of matter.[8] This practice was related to a deep reverence for God's creation as taught in Genesis: 'When statues and altarpieces, like relics and sacraments, called attention to themselves as material stuff, they asserted themselves to be creation, the expression of the divine.'[9] But if medieval religion had a special relationship with the material, it is inevitable that a re-examination of religious materiality in other historical contexts will reveal alternative particularities.

Thirdly, beliefs about matter in historical contexts must be afforded their full complexity and plurality. Bynum's approach gives scope to understanding the variety, inconsistency and – often – paradoxical nature of beliefs about matter held by individuals and societies. To many in the late Middle Ages, matter was both 'radical threat and radical opportunity'.[10] There was an 'intensifying rejection and an intensifying revering of matter as the locus of the divine'.[11] At its heart was the question of how the physical material of the world, which is changeable and decayable, could disclose 'a creator whose nature (eternal, immutable and unknowable) is the opposite of matter'.[12] Such uncertainties led to intense interest in matter, but also to fervent anxieties and vituperative debates. This combination of fascination, fear and

3 Ibid., 30.
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid., 20 and 52; Bynum et al., 'Notes from the Field', 12.
6 Bynum, *Christian Materiality*, 20–21.
7 Ibid., 28.
8 Ibid., 28–30.
9 Bynum et al., 'Notes from the Field', 13.
10 Bynum, *Christian Materiality*, 20.
11 Ibid., 285.
12 Ibid., 285.

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argument is abundantly evident in the early modern period, as religious schisms and encounters brought new challenges and uncertainties.

Spurred on by Bynum's work, the authors in this volume continue her investigation of the multiple and conflicting reactions occasioned by religious materialities beyond the medieval period. In particular, they embrace her challenge to uncover the differences between religious cultures (Christianity, Judaism, Islam and others) by comparing how different faith communities interacted with the material world.[13] The volume also seeks to integrate recent theoretical work in the fields of anthropology and sociology of religion: building on work produced in neighbouring disciplines, we take the view that religion consists as much of practice and materiality as it does of beliefs, theology and writings.

Reconceiving Religion

The effect of material culture studies upon the study of religion has been profound, as the latter has absorbed the numerous, highly original approaches to the material world that have developed over the last twenty years or so. What began as a minor branch of art history and anthropology in the 1980s has become an area of sweeping innovation throughout the humanities and sciences.[14] In 2001, the literary historian Bill Brown introduced 'thing theory', which provided a sophisticated theoretical framework for the study of everyday things within the field of literary studies.[15] Equally, the idea of the agency of objects, explored in different ways by the anthropologist Alfred Gell and the social scientist Bruno Latour, has since become widely known and adopted in the arts and humanities.[16] No less influential has been the work of Arjun Appadurai, Igor Kopytoff and others on the social life of things and the cultural biography of objects.[17]

This wealth of inquiry into the nature of things has made a profound mark on the study of religion and has generated new theoretical and empirical interest in religious objects. Through the pioneering work of David Morgan, Birgit Meyer and Dick Houtman, among others, via publications, conferences and dedicated journals, this approach now stands alongside – and has significantly modified – traditional perspectives that, for instance, have concentrated on the study of a religion's central texts or official doctrines, its institutional histories, its leading exponents and detractors, or the way doctrines or religious ethics shaped wider cultural, political and societal conditions.[18]

13 Ibid., 272–73.

14 See the pioneering article by Prown, 'Mind in Matter'.

15 Brown, 'Thing Theory'.

16 Gell, *Art and Agency*; Latour, *Reassembling the Social*.

17 Appadurai, ed., *Social Life of Things*, and Kopytoff, 'Cultural Biography of Things'.

18 Morgan, ed., *Religion and Material Culture*; Houtman and Meyer, eds., *Things*; Meyer, *Mediation and the Genesis of Presence*. See also the journal *Material Religion*, founded in 2005, whose editors include Morgan and Meyer.

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Indeed, sustained attention to religious artefacts and practices has shifted the very ground on which an understanding of 'religion' is based. Early impetus for this shift came from anthropologists, who, in the absence of texts and other forms of recorded evidence, studied 'externals' as the most accessible way into the belief systems of 'other' cultures. For many scholars this raised an interpretive problem of treating such externals as evidence for something else, for 'beliefs', or the 'spiritual' or the 'transcendent'. As Webb Keane expressed it, this 'tended to put something imperceptible – faith, or beliefs – at the heart of their work' when trying to define religion. An alternative, he suggested, was 'to rethink the relationship between the materiality of religious activity and the ideas that have sometimes been taken to define "religion"'.[19] The wide recognition that the privileging of 'belief' and 'interiority' was the product of a modern, largely Protestant religiosity, and therefore itself historically situated, has raised a more general analytical problem as to whether the very category of 'religion' is coherent across different cultures and cases. As Keane put it, 'Religions may not always demand beliefs, but they will always involve material forms. It is in that materiality that they are part of experience and provoke responses, that they have public lives and enter into ongoing chains of causes and consequences.'[20] The present collection of essays, by covering a culturally and chronologically diverse array of themes, offers an opportunity to bring such theoretical issues into sharper focus and to test the balance of arguments that favour, on the one hand, the idea of universally shared features of the human mind or, on the other, the unique, local confluence of contingent factors and specific historical context, in the formation of religious practice and belief.

In the light of such reorientations, a renewed scholarly focus on the material things of religion themselves – liturgical implements, talismans, amulets, burial clothes, ex-votos, relics and so on – has led to explorations of their capacity to operate variously as loci of supernatural power or as conduits of salvific grace and healing or apotropaic magic; it has provided a range of new insights into the actual workings of religion – the practical mechanics of personal response as well as the collective, social nature of religious practice. As David Morgan has expressed it, 'there is a keen awareness today in recognizing just how deeply dependent religious identity and experience are on the material stuff and ordinary practices of belief [...] Religion is what people do with material things and how these structure and colour experience and one's sense of oneself.'[21]

Behind many of these investigations is an implicit theoretical claim: that things have agency. Building on the work of Alfred Gell and Bruno Latour, many scholars now insist that objects should no longer be considered passive or inert, things to be

19 Keane, 'Evidence of the Senses', 110.

20 Ibid., 124.

21 Editorial statement, *Material Religion*, 4.

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acted upon by humans. The claim is that the properties things possess – the semiotic and symbolic characteristics that arise from their intrinsic materiality, their 'thingness' – have the power to shape human subjectivity and activity.[22] In these terms, material religion is about how objects engage believers, what powers they can come to possess, and in what manner a community comes to rely on them for the vitality and stability of belief.

As Bynum's scholarship indicates, medieval and early modern historians of religion have been especially receptive to the ways material culture can enhance our understanding of the human and social relationships that such objects express and mediate.[23] Eamon Duffy's study of a Devonshire village vividly demonstrated how the church, its statues, vestments and vessels lay at the centre of the local culture of a small mid-sixteenth-century community; how the parishioners' rights and responsibilities in furnishing the church formed the locus of a kind of collective, almost corporate awareness right up to the point of their confiscation during the mid-century Edwardian Reformation.[24] An entire history of ordinary parochial ambitions is traceable through such artefacts (the installation of a new rood screen or the purchase of a set of vestments), which supply a record of religious change and resistance to it.

The material evidence of religion, moreover, allows us to challenge conventional chronologies and models of causation. Religious objects persist over time and beyond the context of their original making, often in changed or repurposed forms. By studying their extended lives, we gain insights into the staying power and continuities of certain belief systems and practices in times of religious change, as well as their ability to emit a range of different symbolic and semiotic meanings, dependent upon changing cultural conditions and contexts.[25] Alexandra Walsham has shown how traditional religious objects that were readapted for reformed use might be seen, as she put it, 'not as inert emblems but as active agents and engines of cultural change […] [in] a dynamic and cyclical process that offers insight into how Protestantism reconfigured traditions of commemoration and patterns of remembrance'. Taking inspiration from Pierre Nora, she analyzes such recontextualized objects 'as *lieux de mémoire*' that 'facilitated forms of both remembering and forgetting: they effaced a past that they simultaneously continued to make present'.[26]

22 Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*; Olsen, *In Defense of Things*; and Harman, *Towards Speculative Realism.*

23 See for instance Rublack, *Reformation Europe*, 211–33; Corry et al., eds., *Madonnas and Miracles;* Hamling and Williams, eds., *Art Re-formed*; Hamling, *Decorating the Godly Household*; Spicer, ed., *Lutheran Churches*; Spicer, 'Material Culture'. For an overview of recent work, see Heal, 'Visual and Material Culture'.

24 Duffy, *Voices of Morebath*.

25 Bynum, 'Are Things "Indifferent"?'; Walsham, 'Domesticating the Reformation'; Gosden and Marshall, 'Cultural Biography of Objects'; Olson et al., eds., 'Biography of the Object'.

26 Walsham, 'Recycling the Sacred', 1124; Nora, ed., *Les Lieux de Mémoire*, and Nora, 'Between Memory and History'.

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The place of material objects in the formation of national as well as local histories has also recently been the subject of fruitful enquiry. Evelin Wetter's study of late medieval goldsmith work, made for the church treasuries of the former Kingdom of Hungary (roughly today's Slovakia and eastern Romania/Transylvania), charts the fate of religious objects in radically different contexts and through long periods of political turmoil in the face of Ottoman invasions, Christian reclamations, territorial divisions and the ensuing incursions of the Reformation. She also reveals the processes by which, from the nineteenth century onward, they became a symbol of a newly conceived 'national art' and a significant part of a Hungarian cultural patrimony.[27] Attention to these objects' fluctuating status and contexts in the great sweep of the intervening centuries demonstrates their continued cultural agency and exposes the unstable and entirely contingent nature of invented traditions.

Finally, objects have been at the heart of recent studies of early modern global trade, networks of intercultural exchange, and the acquisition of knowledge of new worlds.[28] Their study has shown the often far-reaching economic, cultural and artistic consequences of transcontinental trade. Moreover, attention to the processes involved in the exchange of goods and objects, whether by trade, sale or gift, has revealed how profoundly such negotiations could shape social life; how these processes of exchange, often uneven or coercive, can reveal the power dynamics involved.[29] To apply such methods to religious objects – to consider them not just in their originating cultures but as transplanted into often radically different geographical and cultural terrains – is to recognize that objects are intricately entangled with their multiple contexts. Uprooted, they depend upon new sets of human circumstances and relations to confer on them renewed semiotic and symbolic life.[30]

Early Modern Contexts

The early modern period envisaged in this volume stretches from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century and spans the globe.[31] It therefore encompasses an immense variety of religious cultures, regions and communities. While the scope is diverse, a number of broad religious and material conditions that fundamentally shaped early modern religious materiality stand out in this period.

27 Wetter, *Objekt, Überlieferung und Narrativ.*

28 Peck, ed., *Interwoven Globe*; Gerritsen and Riello, eds., *Global Lives of Things*; Markey, *Imagining the Americas*.

29 Again, Arjun Appadurai and Igor Kopytoff, in Appadurai, ed., *Social Life of Things*, are seminal in this respect.

30 For a striking example of an object's potential polyvalency, see Strong, 'The Devil was in that little bone'.

31 For a discussion of European chronologies of modernity in relation to non-European contexts, see Clunas, *Empire*, 7–10.

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In Europe, this was the Age of Reformations – a period of seismic change in which religious materialities clearly played a key role. According to Bynum, the late Middle Ages precipitated a 'crisis of confidence in Christian materiality, out of which came a multitude of responses'.[32] The distinctive styles and aesthetics that accompanied these differing theologies have received much scholarly attention. Catholicism has been distinguished as having a 'sensuous' style and generating numerous 'devotional tools', such as rosaries, Agnus Dei, holy water stoups, crosses and devotional images.[33] Protestantism's relationship with the material has been pursued through studies, for instance, of Calvinist whitewashed churches, a Lutheran baroque style, iconoclasm and domestic decorative objects and schemes.[34]

As Mary Laven has further noted, often 'the religious materialities of the major confessions, Catholic, Lutheran and Reformed, were not discrete'.[35] Both Protestants and Catholics decorated their houses with Old Testament imagery and with Delftware. As Rachel King shows in this volume, rosaries too could be owned by Protestants and Catholics into the seventeenth century. John-Paul Ghobrial's chapter reveals how the Virgin Mary was revered by some Muslim women in Baghdad. Recent work examines which material and visual features were specific to or shared by those of different confessions, with some of the most informative new findings emerging from studies on multiconfessional areas.

Geography was also important in shaping distinctive confessional visual and material cultures. Local religious cultures materialized into unique forms, as has been powerfully demonstrated by William Christian.[36] Proximity to an 'other' faith could sometimes intensify difference, as in Germany where devotion to the Virgin Mary signalled religious identity on the borders of areas where faith was contested.[37] Ghobrial's chapter shows that close attention to material culture allowed those in mixed communities in the Middle East to differentiate between complex religious identities. His work underlines the value of examining multiconfessional areas to gain a more nuanced understanding of the interplay between religious identities and material cultures. Of course, as his chapter shows, religious change was not limited to Christian Europe. Numerous messianic movements arose in Islamic and Jewish communities, forming specific cults with their own material modes.[38] Under Mehmed

32 Bynum, *Christian Materiality*, 272

33 Chipps Smith, *Sensuous Worship*; Bailey, *Between Renaissance and Baroque*; Hall and Cooper, eds., *Sensuous in the Counter-Reformation Church*; see also Verdi Webster, *Art and Ritual*; Brundin et al., *Sacred Home*; Evangelisti, 'Material Culture', 395.

34 For example, Spicer, *Calvinist Churches*; Heal, 'Lutheran Baroque'; Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*; Hamling, *Decorating the Godly Household*; Walsham, 'Domesticating the Reformation'.

35 Laven, 'Devotional Objects', 244; see also Spicer, ed., *Lutheran Churches*.

36 Christian, *Local Religion*; cf. Verdi Webster, *Art and Ritual*.

37 Heal, *Cult of the Virgin Mary*; Heal, 'Better Papist than Calvinist'.

38 In the Ottoman Empire, we can note the emergence of Muslim cult leaders, including the millenarian dervish, Kalenderoghlu in the 1520s; in Judaism, messianic stirrings in Jewish communities, such as that led by Sabbatai Sevi in Izmir, led to migration and discord that found material forms (see Barkey, *Empire of Difference*, 189).

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IV (1648–87) the Kadizadeli movement in the Ottoman Empire promoted spiritual conversion, rationality and the interiorization of religion, while opposing ecstatic Islam including traditional Sufi rituals, dance and music.[39] Mass forced Jewish and Islamic migrations from Iberia from the fifteenth century onwards led to the translation of visual and material styles and techniques across the Mediterranean region. Minarets in the newly established immigrant neighbourhoods of Testour in Tunisia reflected the style of those left behind in Aragon or Toledo.[40] Alternatively, as Sara Kuehn's work here on Sufis in the Balkans shows, religious migration could provide freedom from scrutiny, allowing unique adaptations of beliefs, rituals and visual forms to develop.

Material culture thus brings to light nuances in the nature (the speed, and the local and confessional variety) of early modern religious changes. However, as we have already suggested, it did not merely reflect change; it also played an influential part in shaping its character. Examining the life cycles of objects draws our attention to the longevity of religious cultures, and how they morphed over time in a piecemeal way. Religious objects in the early modern period consisted not only of newly commissioned and newly made items, but also of great numbers of objects that survived from previous eras. Medieval artefacts were reinterpreted, recontextualized, repurposed and recycled in Protestant and reformed Catholic contexts.[41] Bynum has noted the paradox that medieval religious art is well preserved in areas of Protestant Germany.[42] Paying attention to material culture often reveals slow religious change and provides new perspectives on confessionalization.[43] Religious history no longer necessarily hinges on the dates of publications of treatises or events involving elite individuals, but rather meanders through lengthy phases of transition as reflected in the changing everyday material worlds of believers. King's chapter here on amber rosaries shows how focusing on one devotional item can reveal a different story of religious change. Amber paternosters could easily be transformed into beaded jewellery or medicinal matter in a Protestant context, but at the same time, they held a potential historical meaning and memory of spiritual power for their owners. Abigail Krasner Balbale's chapter shows how Islamic texts were repurposed in Morisco Spain in this period. In Tibet, Hildegard Diemberger reveals that Buddhist texts were preserved as sacred relics, but that each recitation brought such items into the present.

39 Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*.

40 Muchnik, 'Judeoconversos and Moriscos', 420

41 Ivanič, 'Religious Materiality in Seventeenth-Century Prague', 264; see also reference to the 'accretion of previous worship' in Bynum, 'Are Things "Indifferent"?', 92.

42 Bynum, 'Are Things "Indifferent"?', 88 and 91; see also Spicer, ed., *Lutheran Churches*, 4; Heal, 'Better Papist than Calvinist'.

43 Bynum, 'Are Things "Indifferent"?', 91, n. 11; see also Ivanič, 'Religious Materiality in Seventeenth-Century Prague', 24–25.

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Overlaying religious change, processes of globalization also affected early modern religious materiality. Vivian Mann speaks of the strong, mutually supportive relationships that bound congregations of Spanish-Portuguese Jews across the western hemisphere: this sense of community was materially bound by donations of liturgical objects that travelled between North America, London, Amsterdam and the Caribbean. For early modern Christians, mobility went hand in hand with evangelization and signalled a new opportunity for the centrifugal spread of the true faith across the world by means of the missions to Asia, Africa and the Americas.[44] Religious objects were fundamental to this activity, particularly in the context of the Catholic missions: rosaries and medals converted and cured the new faithful in South-East Asia and didactic images communicated Christian teachings in China.[45] Recent work has refined our understanding of how these items were understood, received and adapted in new contexts. Jesuits in China, for example, sensitive to existing beliefs, ensured that the story of Mary in China resonated with indigenous ideas of the mother god. Another strategy was to hybridize material and visual styles, as long as content and form remained largely prescribed: the obsidian mirror in an atrial cross in Taximoroa, Mexico, fused meanings of old and new religions, images from Wierix's Gospels were sinified to appeal to Chinese audiences, and native forms and styles were included in church facades to create an 'Andean hybrid baroque'.[46]

Several chapters in this volume contribute to this rebalancing act. Gabriela Ramos draws attention away from the public material forms of religion to show how the Virgin of Copacabana was domesticated through the personal ownership of her image. John-Paul Ghobrial skilfully unpicks the available evidence to explore the intricacies of religious coexistence in the Ottoman Empire, and Sara Kuehn investigates how Ottoman expansion into Europe created new visual and material ritual practices that last to this day. Innovative anthropological methodologies such as Kuehn's can thus cast new light on the early modern world, especially in areas where religious practice and experience lack written documentation.

Globalization had an impact on Europeans too: it led to easier access to religious objects from foreign lands, and greater contact with different faiths and practices. Ramos notes how images of the Virgin of Copacabana came to Spain and Italy in the seventeenth century and 'were displayed in altars in convents and monasteries and as objects of devotion in private homes'. Existing work has focused on encounters with 'other' sacred items from new lands and prioritized investigations into how early modern men and women categorized sacred items in opposition to proscribed 'savage' objects. Studying *Kunstkammer* inventory texts, Carina Johnson has argued that sacred items from Mexico were treated as pagan and lost their spiritual meaning

44 Hsia, ed., *Companion to Early Modern Catholic Global Missions*; Clossey, *Salvation and Globalization*; Laven, *Mission to China*; Županov, *Missionary Tropics*.

45 Alberts, *Conflict and Conversion*, 147–59; Bamji et al., eds., *Ashgate Research Companion.*

46 Walsham, 'Sacred Landscape', 219–20; Laven, *Mission to China*, 230–33; Bailey, *Andean Hybrid Baroque*.

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when they were collected.[47] Indeed, the princely collections of Europe are ideal places to investigate such encounters and contacts. Focus on the textual descriptions of such items, however, only gives a partial snapshot as to how these artefacts were viewed, prioritizing categories and discourses as opposed to the practices that are harder to discern in primary material.[48] In this volume, Kate E. Holohan pushes beyond this to suggest that 'pagan' items could still be seen as powerful and sacred by their European collectors, using as evidence Philip II's interest in the healing properties of New Spanish jades.

European collections also bear witness to the interconnected production of religious objects. The coconut-shell *aspersorium* featured in Suzanna Ivanič's chapter, for example, was made in Ceylon and Goa and ended up in Europe. On the way it acquired a bezoar stone probably sourced in the Middle East. Increasing numbers of religious items featured such 'global assemblage' in this period, being made with materials acquired from around the world.[49] As recent work has pointed out, we need to be alert not just to the roots but also to the routes of religious artefacts, attending to the new layers of meaning that were wrapped around these items as they travelled.[50] The Jewish spice-box turned Christian reliquary with which this introduction started gives a taste of the rich histories implanted within objects. Certain items from this period acted as palimpsests, with different cultures and different religious traditions inscribed upon them. Such artefacts raise questions about the 'indifference' of objects, or whether the 'accretion of previous worship' is immortalized in materiality.[51]

The material conditions of the early modern period were further affected by a dramatic rise in the availability and consumption of goods. The impact on religious culture has been noted by Richard Goldthwaite, who traced how religious art objects proliferated in Italy as a result of the rise in wealth following the Black Death of the fourteenth century.[52] It is evident that religious 'things' continued to proliferate, as is shown for example by Floriano Grimaldi's studies of early modern Loreto. Pilgrims flocked there to see the Virgin Mary's miraculously transported house and were confronted with a vast array of devotional items and memorabilia for sale.[53] Roman customs registers from the fifteenth century record 'barrels' of glass and enamel rosaries entering the city.[54] The chapters in this volume exemplify the expanded material religious world of the early modern period. Maria Alessandra Chessa and Mary Laven show how votive

47 Johnson, 'Stone Gods'; Johnson, *Cultural Hierarchy*, esp. 254–57.

48 Compare, for example, Keating and Markey, '"Indian" Objects'.

49 Ajmar and Molà 'Global Renaissance'; Bleichmar and Martin, eds., 'Objects in Motion'; Gerritsen and Riello, eds., *Global Lives of Things*; Riello, 'Global Objects; Clunas, 'Connected Material Histories'.

50 Gerritsen and Riello, eds., *Global Lives of Things*; Flood, *Objects of Translation*; Bevilacqua and Pfeifer, 'Turquerie'.

51 Bynum, 'Are Things "Indifferent"?', 92 and 111.

52 Goldthwaite, *Wealth and Demand for Art*.

53 Grimaldi, *Pellegrini e pellegrinaggi*, and *Argentieri*; see also Brundin et al., *Sacred Home*, 113–48.

54 Esch, 'Roman Customs Registers'.

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objects, available in a variety of media from paper and wax to painted wooden boards, played a crucial role in rituals of supplication. Different materials, they argue, actively shaped patterns of devotion. Meanwhile, Alexandra Bamji reveals the proliferation of paraphernalia associated with burial from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century. The expanding world of religious goods enabled the domestication of devotion, but it also provided opportunities for the pious to make their material mark on churches and other religious institutions. Vivian Mann provides copious evidence of members of the Shearith Israel congregation in New York commissioning silver items – from candlesticks to instruments of circumcision – for use in the synagogue.

While expanding markets, global imports and technological innovations conditioned religious materialities, theology and natural philosophy also played their part. Recent work has indicated the potential for considering matter and making in relation to early modern natural philosophy and artisanal work.[55] Ivanič is inspired by this approach to look anew at the crafting of precious stones. She concludes that the sacred was evident not just in religious objects, but was embedded in the very matter out of which art was created.[56] Knowledge of matter in this period was not only derived from book learning; to a great extent it was borne of artisanal practice and skill.[57] Moreover, meanings ascribed to matter changed over time and across cultures. Thus we learn how knowledge of jade was established through encounters with different substances from New Spain (Holohan), how amber took on new meanings in different confessional contexts (King) and how paper was used to create sacred objects with deep devotional meaning in a local context (Chessa).

Dramatic religious change in the early modern period, accompanied by new attitudes to the material world, had profound consequences for lived religious experience. While it is impossible to provide a comprehensive survey, or a single, coherent model of 'early modern religious materiality' across religions or even among the different strands of a single religion, this volume sets out to demonstrate the plurality of early modern religious materialities as they functioned in different contexts and to suggest some points of commonality and divergence among them.

Meanings, Practices, Transformations

Meanings, practices and transformations are woven through this volume like the three strands of a plait. While all three themes are present in every chapter, they are also probed successively in each of the three sections of the book.

55 Smith, *Body of the Artisan*; Smith and Beentjes, 'Nature and Art'.

56 Ivanič, 'Amulets'; Ivanič, 'Early Modern Religious Objects'.

57 Rublack, 'Matter in the Material Renaissance'; Lehmann, 'How Materials Make Meaning', 18; Anderson et al., 'Introduction', 12.

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Part I focuses on material meanings. The chapters interrogate the significance of particular substances (wax, wood and paper in Renaissance Italian ex-votos), the entanglement of message and medium (in sacred texts and voiced relics) and the importance of design and craft techniques (in the rendering of paper or the fashioning of silver). In this section, the authors move beyond the static notion of materials exhibiting essential properties and explore instead the dynamic nature of matter – sometimes stubbornly durable and at other times precarious and fragile – as it interacted with makers and users.

If the material turn has encouraged historians to engage in object-focused research, religious materialities are often transient and can only be reconstructed with reference to documented practices. The fruitfulness of this approach is explored in Part II, through an investigation of what Ghobrial refers to as 'submerged' materialities. Bodily practices, such as fasting, eating, sexual abstinence or piercing exemplify materialities that can no longer be studied in their physical form but which were once fundamental to religious identities and classifications. Textual evidence is brought into dialogue with surviving objects in order to reconstruct the material culture of death (a culture that is inevitably marked by decay and disintegration) and to recover the embodied experience of living with religious images.

Finally, Part III explores the many ways in which religious objects were transformed as they shifted between different faith communities (from Catholicism to Protestantism, from Islam to Christianity), crossed geographical boundaries (from the New World to the Old) and moved between sacred and secular settings (religious objects in the *Kunstkammer*). The chapters in this section of the book point to more general conclusions. Religious materialities cannot be boiled down to their essential properties; they do not hold fixed meaning; they do not stand still. Rather, they are enlivened by human practices, by their own organic development and by an ongoing 'dance of agency' between objects and people.[58]

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58 Pickering, 'Material Culture and the Dance of Agency', 195.

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