



Fig. 1. Doberan (Germany), former abbey church, interior looking east with furnishings mainly from the 14th century. Photo Justin Kroesen & Regnerus Steensma.

# The Survival of Medieval Furnishings in Lutheran Churches

Notes towards a Comparison between Germany and Scandinavia

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*Abstract* Perhaps paradoxically, of all medieval churches in Europe, those that became Lutheran during the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation possess the greatest wealth of medieval interior elements. Compared to Puritan Britain and the Calvinist Low Countries, Lutheran churches were not as thoroughly stripped of their medieval furnishings, while on the other hand Baroque renewals were much less far-reaching here than in Catholic regions. Although Lutheranism in general exerted a preserving effect on medieval church interiors, there are important differences between regions, both within Germany and between Germany and Scandinavia (here to be understood as “the Nordic countries”, i.e. including Finland and Iceland). This article makes a first attempt towards a comparison of the survival rates of medieval church furnishings in Lutheran Germany and the European North. Both regions are more or less on a par with regard to several specific elements including high altars and their decorations, triumphal arch crosses and baptismal fonts. However, other elements, such as tabernacles, choir stalls, chancel screens, pulpits and side altars are much more often preserved in Germany than in Scandinavia. It may be concluded, therefore, that the Reformation generally had further-reaching implications on the material culture of Nordic church buildings than on German ones.

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## *Introduction*

In German art-historical scholarship, the past decades have seen a growing acknowledgement of what may be described as “the paradox of the preserving Reformation”.

Other than what has traditionally been maintained, the Lutheran Reformation not only brought about sweeping changes to church interiors, including the removal

or destruction of medieval furnishings and works of art, but at the same time it resulted in manifold continuities of traditional rituals, church furnishings, and images. The “preserving power of Lutheranism” (“Die bewahrende Kraft des Luthertums”) has meanwhile even become something of a motto – although not uncontested – in German scholarship.<sup>1</sup> Whatever the precise balance between continuity and change may have been in thousands of specific cases, it is a fact that Europe’s best preserved medieval interior ensembles are found in churches that were taken over by Lutheran Protestants during the sixteenth century. This contribution makes a first attempt to draw a comparison between the preserving Reformations in Germany and the Nordic countries. As will be shown, developments in both areas show many similarities, but at the same time there are important differences. The article makes a tour through an imaginary medieval church interior calling at the most important common elements, from the high altar in the chancel to the baptismal font at the west end of the nave.<sup>2</sup> The limited size of this study and the vast extension of the area under scrutiny obviously only allows for a comparison in broad outlines.<sup>3</sup>

In articles published in 2005 and 2017, I have tried to set the relative wealth of medieval survivals in Lutheran churches in a European perspective.<sup>4</sup> Contrary to the Calvinists in the Netherlands and the Puritans in England, the Lutherans, who gained the upper hand in the Reformation in large parts of Germany and Scandina-

via, generally took a much milder stance towards the religious past in that they accepted much of its traditional ritual and material culture.<sup>5</sup> Outbursts of Iconoclasm did occur here and there, but it never gained a systematic character because Martin Luther himself strongly opposed any form of image-breaking.<sup>6</sup> After the transition, many interior elements were left intact, from altars to baptismal fonts and from choir stalls to tabernacles. Most of these objects continued to serve in the Protestant cult, such as altars and fonts. Other elements were maintained because they were given a different function, or survived even though they had lost their function (sometimes displaced and stored away). At a conference organized in Dresden in 1995 by the Catholic (!) Görres Gesellschaft, entitled “Die bewahrende Kraft des Luthertums” (“the preserving power of Lutheranism”), Frank Schmidt, head of heritage at the regional Lutheran church in Saxony, cogently described these three options as *Weiternutzung* (“continued use”), *Umnutzung* (“altered use”) and *Nichtnutzung* (“non-use”).<sup>7</sup>

Anyone who is searching for the best-preserved medieval church interiors in Europe will end up in the Lutheran parts of Germany. Moreover, this is true of churches of all sorts, from cathedrals to modest country churches. The best-preserved monastic church interior is the former monastery at Doberan near Rostock (Mecklenburg-Vorpommern), where almost all original church furnishings from the fourteenth century survive to date (fig. 1).<sup>8</sup>

The best medieval cathedral interior is no doubt found in Halberstadt (Saxony-Anhalt), where a rood loft, Calvary group, choir stalls, a tabernacle, a number of side altars, lecterns, candleholders, a baptismal font and many statues have remained in situ (fig. 11). In addition, the adjacent cathedral treasury (Domschatz) is among the greatest of its kind in Europe.<sup>9</sup> The most complete surviving town parish church interior is undoubtedly St Laurence’s in Nuremberg (Bavaria). Here, besides the famous Sacrament tower by Adam Krafft and the hanging *Englische Gruß* by Veit Stoss (fig. 6), no less than ten side altars survive intact with their corresponding altarpieces, even though these had lost their function with the arrival of Lutheranism.<sup>10</sup> And finally, a large number of Europe’s best preserved medieval country church interiors are found all over Germany, from Mecklenburg on the Baltic coast to Franconia in Bavaria.<sup>11</sup> It is only in this last category that Lutheran Germany is rivaled on the Scandinavian side by parts of Denmark, Scania and – particularly – the Swedish island of Gotland.<sup>12</sup>

In other countries of Europe, medieval church interiors have generally survived to a lesser extent, due to a variety of reasons. In England and the Low Countries, as well as in large parts of France and Switzerland, Calvinist tendencies led to the large-scale destruction of medieval church furnishings during the iconoclastic fury of the mid-sixteenth century.<sup>13</sup> Contrary to what may perhaps be expected, the survival of medieval furnishings in countries and

regions that remained faithful to Rome was hardly better ensured. Partly in reaction to the success of the Protestant Reformation, the Roman Catholic Church set out on a large-scale Counter- or Catholic Reformation, starting with the Council of Trent (1545–1563), which had far-reaching consequences for the interior appearance of church buildings.<sup>14</sup> In Southern Germany and neighboring Austria, as well as in Italy, Spain and Portugal, and in most parts of eastern Central Europe renewals in the Renaissance and Baroque styles have resulted in medieval interior ensembles being scarce today.<sup>15</sup> In France, the largest wave of destruction would follow during the French Revolution, while the two world wars of the twentieth century have caused massive losses across the continent, particularly in Northern France, Belgium and Germany.<sup>16</sup> Interestingly, the special position of Lutheranism is confirmed once again by two regions outside Germany and Scandinavia that are relatively rich in medieval church furnishings, namely the Slovak Spiš region and Romanian Transylvania: both became Lutheran during the sixteenth century.

### *Chancel furnishings*

Lutheran churches in Germany possess hundreds of high altars, many still with their original altarpieces or “retables”. In their first Germany-wide survey of the late nineteenth century, Ernst Franz Münzenberger and Stephan Beissel counted around 2000 medieval altarpieces.<sup>17</sup> It is a cautious estimate that about two thirds

of these adorn high altars in now Lutheran churches or stem from such contexts. Medieval altarpieces in German Lutheran churches reflect the entire spectrum from Romanesque models, for example in the former abbey church at Loccum (Lower Saxony), to the monumental splendor of the late Gothic style, in the former abbey church of Blaubeuren (Baden-Württemberg) (fig. 2). It can even be maintained that the entire typological and iconographical development of medieval altarpieces could be written on the basis of surviving examples in Lutheran Germany alone. It is no coincidence, for example, that in Norbert Wolf's study of fourteenth-century winged altarpieces from 2002 entitled *Deutsche Schnitzretabel des 14. Jahrhunderts* those from Lutheran contexts outnumber those from Catholic ones by 2:1.<sup>18</sup> The Lutherans generally accepted the medieval altars with their decorations as focuses for worship and prayer, even in cases where their iconography did not accord with the Lutheran ideals, for example when the central chest was filled with non-Biblical images of the life of the Virgin or statues of saints.

Regarding the survival rate of high altars, Scandinavia offers a similar picture. In the Lutheran North hundreds of high altarpieces are preserved, roughly 450 in Sweden and over 200 in Denmark, while another 100 are found in Norway, Finland and Iceland.<sup>19</sup> Compared to Germany, however, medieval altarpieces in Scandinavia generally show somewhat less iconographical variety, since their programs

largely concentrate on Christological and Mariological motifs, and less on the saints. Therefore, it can be concluded that retables containing statues of saints or scenes from their *Vitae* were removed here more thoroughly than in Germany, especially the South.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, changes made to medieval retables after the Reformation were more common in Scandinavia than in Germany, particularly in Denmark.<sup>21</sup> However, some aspects of the surviving medieval high altars in Scandinavia stand out. Firstly, the Nordic countries possess far more altar frontals than have been preserved in Germany. This form of altar decoration especially flourished before the rise of the (winged) altarpiece, between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries. Of little over one hundred high medieval wooden painted altar frontals that survive throughout Europe, thirty are found in Norway alone (fig. 3).<sup>22</sup> To these may be added around twenty late Gothic painted frontals preserved in Denmark.<sup>23</sup> In contrast, the number of similar objects surviving in Germany hardly exceeds a dozen.

Early forms of medieval altar decoration are generally better preserved in the Nordic countries than in Germany, perhaps because Late Gothic had somewhat less impact in some regions. The mid-twelfth-century "gyldne altre" ("golden altars") from Lisbjerg, Odder and Sahl, all in Danish Jutland, are ensembles of frontal and retable entirely covered in gilded copper.<sup>24</sup> Their arched retables are among the oldest known altarpieces in Europe. The Nordic countries can also pride them-



Fig. 2. Blaubeuren (Germany), former abbey church, high altar retable, wood, 1493–1494. Photo Justin Kroesen & Regnerus Steensma.



Fig. 3. Bergen (Norway), University Museum, altar frontal from Nes (Sogn og Fjordane), wood, c. 1315. Photo Justin Kroesen.

selves on possessing numerous “tabernacle shrines” that consist of an openwork baldachin containing one figure – mostly the Virgin and Child – and equipped with folding doors carrying relief scenes on the insides. The thirteenth-century Marian shrines from Urjala (Pirkanmaa, Finland) (fig. 4), Fröskog (Dalsland, Sweden) and Hedalen (Oppland, Norway) share a number of common features with examples found elsewhere, especially in Italy and Spain, but they have only few parallels in Germany today.<sup>25</sup> Of around five hundred examples of such tabernacle shrines from between the thirteenth and early sixteenth centuries preserved whol-

ly or largely across Europe, around half are found in Sweden alone.<sup>26</sup> Finally, it should also be mentioned that Sweden (especially the island of Gotland) possesses a number of highly remarkable wingless altarpieces from the first half and middle of the fourteenth century.<sup>27</sup> These retables, that are practically unparalleled in Germany today, provide a rare impression of what altar decorations looked like on the eve of the rise of the late Gothic “Flügelaltar” (“winged retable”).

During the late Middle Ages the Southern Netherlands, particularly the cities of Antwerp and Brussels, became Europe’s primary exporting region of altarpieces.<sup>28</sup>



Fig. 4. Helsinki (Finland), National Museum, tabernacle shrine containing the Virgin and Child (later changed into St Anne and the Virgin) from Urjala (Pirkanmaa), wood, late 13th century. Photo Justin Kroesen.

Due to Calvinist Iconoclasm in present-day Belgium, Netherlandish altarpieces in both Germany and Scandinavia by far outnumber those in the country of origin.<sup>29</sup> The cathedral of Swedish Strängnäs (Södermanland) possesses no less than three winged retables of Brussels origins, while Vasterås Cathedral (Västmanland) has

two Antwerp altarpieces and one from Brussels.<sup>30</sup> Preserved examples in their area of origin are even rarer with regard to altarpieces from Utrecht, which was the most important production center in the Northern Netherlands. Although several examples in northwestern Germany may be connected to Utrecht workshops,

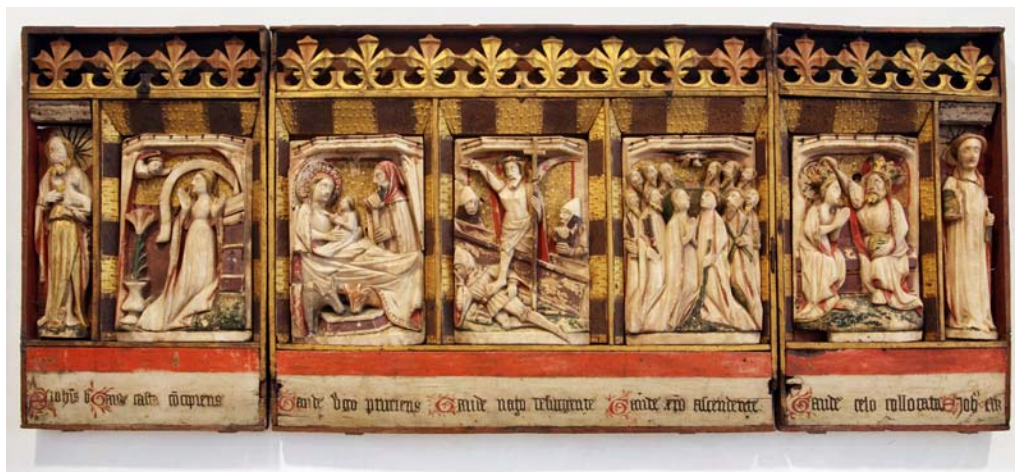


Fig. 5. Copenhagen (Denmark), National Museum, winged altarpiece from Munkaþverá (Iceland), wood and alabaster, c. 1425. Photo Justin Kroesen.

the only more or less coherent cluster of Utrecht altarpieces is found in Norway. In addition to the five retables that had been identified as such in the 1950s, Kristin Kausland recently ascribed several more pieces to workshops in the Dutch cathedral city, including two in northern Norway (Hillesøy and Trondenes) and the altarpiece from Austevoll (Hordaland) now kept at the University Museum of Bergen.<sup>31</sup> Triptychs with alabaster reliefs of English origins, which have hardly survived in Britain itself, are found in their entirety in Borbjerg and Vejrum, both in Jutland, as well as in the National Museum of Copenhagen, originally from Munkaþverá monastery on Iceland (fig. 5).<sup>32</sup> Complete triptychs of this kind are unparalleled in Germany.<sup>33</sup>

An element of central importance in the chancel of medieval churches that has

survived much less frequently than high altars is the Sacrament house or tabernacle, in the shape of a niche or cupboard which served to store the consecrated Host after the celebration of Mass.<sup>34</sup> This practice was abolished by the Lutherans, which resulted in many Sacrament niches and towers being removed and destroyed. Despite this, Lutheran churches in Germany still possess a large number of medieval tabernacles in the form of wall niches and free-standing towers in stone and wood. The German Sacrament houses constitute by far the largest stock of their kind in Europe and reflect the entire medieval development from modest Romanesque models to soaring late Gothic towers including the earlier mentioned “Sakramentshaus” in St Laurence in Nuremberg, erected by Adam Krafft in 1493–1496 (fig. 6).<sup>35</sup> In most parts of Scandinavia, medieval tab-

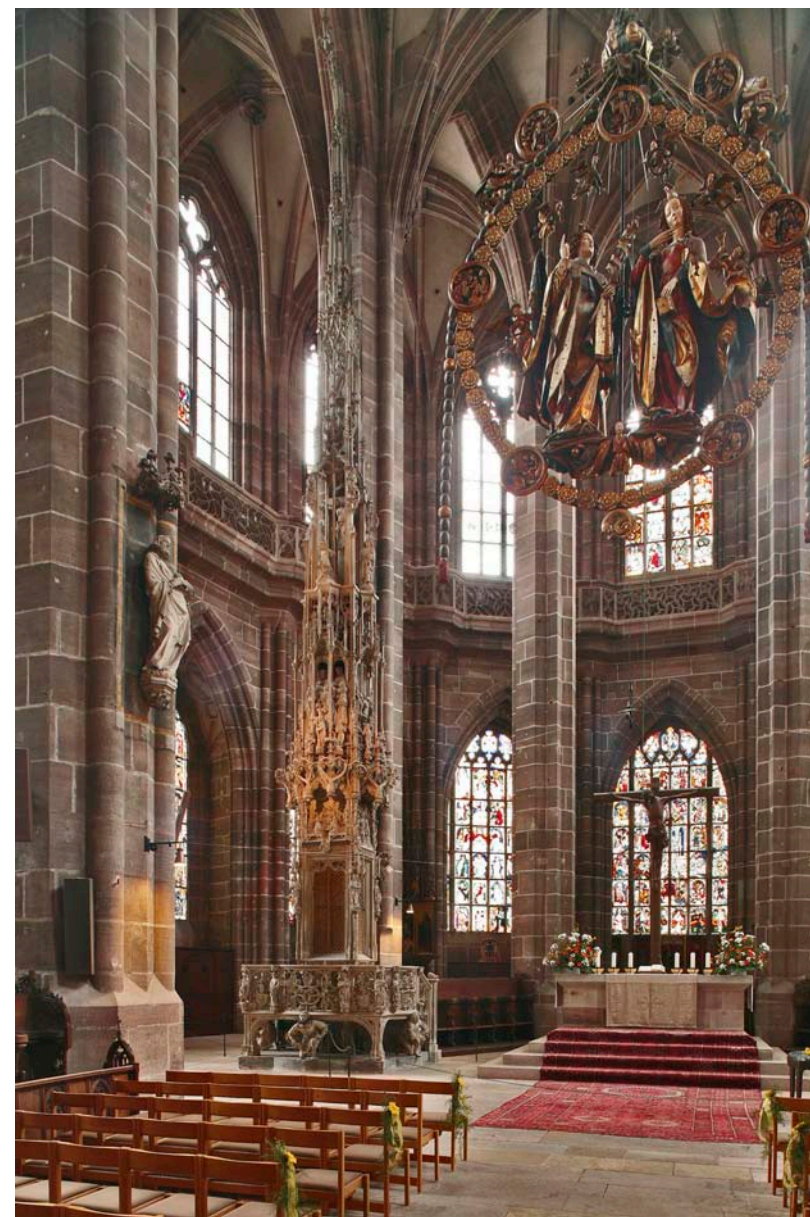


Fig. 6. Nuremberg (Germany), St Laurence, interior of the chancel looking east with Sacrament tower, stone, 1493–1496. To the right: the Englische Gruß, wood, 1517–1518. Photo Justin Kroesen & Regnerus Steensma.



*Fig. 7. Hee (Denmark), village church, Sacrament niche with door showing Christ as the Man of Sorrows amidst heraldry, wood, 1460-1470. Photo Justin Kroesen.*

ernacles are found much more rarely. A handful of late Gothic wooden sacrament cupboards survive in Denmark, including Haraldsted on Zealand and Øland (Oxholm) in Jutland, while a remarkable wood-lined niche with a painted door is preserved in Hee (Jutland) (fig. 7). In mainland Sweden, simple niches are occasionally found, while Sacrament towers survive in the cathedrals of Linköping (Östergötland, in stone, fifteenth century) and Lund (Scania, in wood, fourteenth century), as well as in several village churches includ-

ing Hammarö (Värmland) (fig. 8), Lagga and Villberga (Uppland).<sup>36</sup>

The only exception to the rule is found – once again – in the medieval churches of Gotland, where Sacrament niches survive in about 55 of its 91 country churches.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, most of these wall cupboards are contemporary to the church buildings, most of which were erected in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, a period that is poorly represented even among tabernacles in Germany.<sup>38</sup> Together, the early medieval tabernacles



*Fig. 8. Hammarö (Sweden), village church, Sacrament cupboard, wood, late 15th century. Photo Justin Kroesen.*

of Gotland constitute the largest more or less coherent group of their kind in Europe. In all their variety, they offer a unique impression of how the Eucharist was stored in European parish churches during the century following the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 (fig. 9). One reason for the overall scarcity of medie-

val tabernacles in Scandinavia may have been that many were freestanding and carried out in wood, as was also the case in northern Germany. Such furnishings are obviously more vulnerable than stone ones, and easier to remove. Furthermore, many churches in Denmark and Sweden are built of granite, which makes the crea-

tion of wall niches a rather difficult affair. In addition, the fact that Norway hardly provides any evidence for the existence of tabernacles could perhaps be explained by the practice of storing the Host in a hanging pyx over the altar, which was a widespread custom in England and France.<sup>39</sup> Wooden towers and hanging pyxes obvi-

ously leave no traces once they lose their function and are removed.

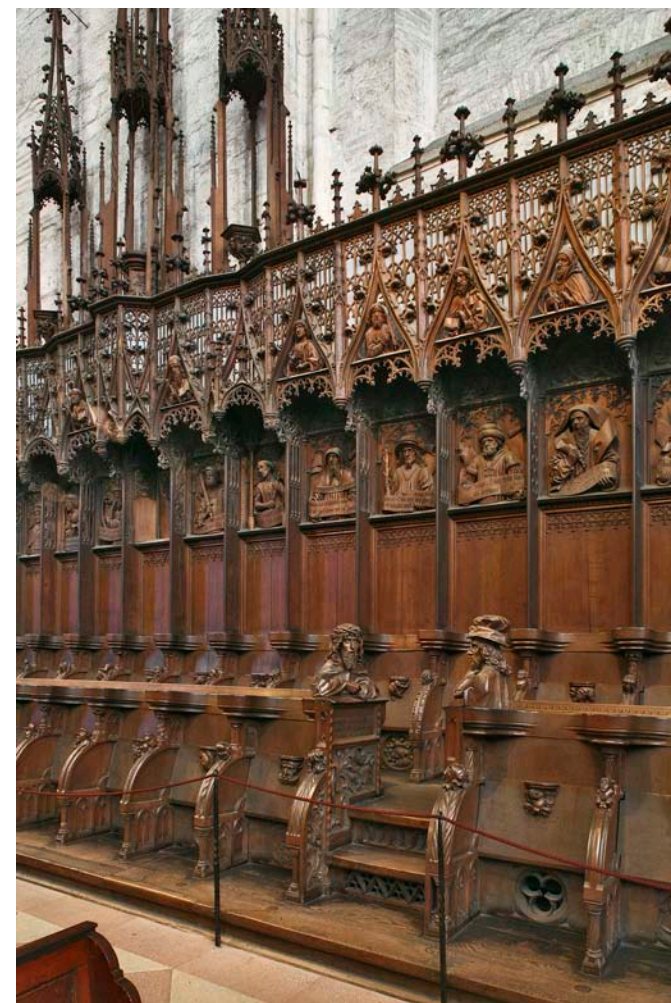
Another central element in medieval chancel furnishings includes choir stalls that were designed for priests to be used for the singing of the Hours. In this respect, Germany again possesses the greatest wealth, which by far surpasses the extant

stock in Scandinavia.<sup>40</sup> Choir stalls surviving in Lutheran churches in Germany enable their entire medieval development to be drawn, from the sturdy Romanesque stalls in Ratzeburg Cathedral (Schleswig-Holstein) and Loccum Abbey (Lower Saxony) to the splendid late Gothic sets of Ulm (fig. 10) and Blaubeuren in Swabia (Baden-

Württemberg; fig. 2) created by Jörg Syrlin the Elder and the Younger, respectively. In Southern Germany in particular, medieval choir stalls are also quite commonly found in village churches, for example in Ditzingen, Ennetach, Oberlenningen, Ofterdingen and Tiefenbronn.<sup>41</sup> An important reason for choir stalls to have survived less



*Fig. 9. Källunge (Sweden), village church, Sacrament niche above three steps, stone and wood, c. 1300. Photo Justin Kroesen.*



*Fig. 10. Ulm (Germany), Our Lady ("Minster"), choir stalls by Jörg Syrlin the Elder, wood, 1469–1474. Photo Justin Kroesen & Regnerus Steensma.*

frequently in Scandinavian churches is the fact that the dissolution of the monasteries was much more radical here than in several parts of Germany where many lived on as Lutheran “Stiftskirchen” (collegiate churches) or were converted into centers of education.<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, some Scandinavian cathedrals preserve important sets, including Lund (Scania, Sweden) from c. 1370 and Roskilde (Zealand, Denmark) from c. 1420. In addition, smaller choir stalls are occasionally found in Swedish country churches including Veckholm in Uppland and Gothem and Kräklingbo on Gotland.<sup>43</sup>

#### *Between the chancel and nave*

In medieval churches the chancel was usually separated from the nave by a partition in the shape of a rail, a wall or gallery (“rood loft”), the so-called rood screen or choir screen, which in German is known as a “Lettner”, a term derived from the Latin term *lectorium* or *lectionarium*. This implied a de facto bipartition of medieval church space into a clerical realm and a space for the laity. With the arrival of Lutheranism, the entire community was henceforth invited to receive Communion at the high altar, which turned the choir screen into an obstacle. Nevertheless, Lutheran churches in Germany still possess the greatest wealth of surviving choir screens with rood lofts on the European continent.<sup>44</sup> Of around forty preserved chancel screens in Germany, some thirty are found in churches that are now Lutheran.<sup>45</sup> Together they reflect its entire

development from early models in the late Romanesque style, as in the cathedral of Naumburg (c. 1220), to late Gothic examples, for example in Halberstadt Cathedral (c. 1505) (fig. 11), both in Saxony-Anhalt. Beyond cathedrals, medieval choir screens in Lutheran Germany are also found in former monastic churches, for example in the Franciscans’ church in Rothenburg ob der Tauber (Bavaria) and the Dominicans’ church (Predigerkirche) in Erfurt (Thuringia), as well as in parish churches including Niefern and Bönningheim (Baden-Württemberg).<sup>46</sup> Remarkably, in East Frisia (Lower Saxony), medieval choir screens are found in several now Lutheran village churches, including Holtrop, Buttforde and Schortens.<sup>47</sup>

In comparison, the number of preserved pre-Reformation choir screens in Scandinavia is conspicuously small.<sup>48</sup> However, they may have originally been quite common here too.<sup>49</sup> One reason for their rare survival may be the use of wood, which made them both more vulnerable and easier to remove. A surviving screen structure composed of wooden beams from the village church of Balkåkra (Scania), that has been dendrochronologically dated to 1485–1486, is now in the University Historical Museum of Lund (fig. 12).<sup>50</sup> The earliest Scandinavian screens are found in western Norway and share many characteristics with contemporary screens in England. The stave church of Hopperstad (Sogn og Fjordane) has a wooden partition with trefoil openings in the upper section dating from the late thirteenth century.



Fig. 11. Halberstadt (Germany), cathedral, rood loft, stone, c. 1505. Above: Calvary group, wood, 1210–1220. Photo Justin Kroesen.





Fig. 12. Lund (Sweden), University Historical Museum, rood screen from Balkåkra (Scania), wood, 1485–1486. The Calvary Group on top of it is from Gualöv Church (Scania), c. 1200–1250. Photo Justin Kroesen.

ry.<sup>51</sup> In Eidfjord (Hordaland), important parts of a wooden screen built from beams around 1300 survive, while the carved parapet from a mid-thirteenth-century rood loft is found in the church of Kinn (Sogn og Fjordane).<sup>52</sup> In addition, several thirteenth-century churches in western Norway offer circumstantial evidence for the former presence of choir screens, for example Tingvoll (Møre og Romsdal) and Voss (Hordaland).<sup>53</sup> In Voss there is a staircase inside the transversal wall between the nave and chancel that gave access to a former gallery.<sup>54</sup> Late Gothic parapets of vanished rood screens are found in the church of Korppoo (Finland) and

in the University Museum of Trondheim (Norway).<sup>55</sup> Both carvings can be dated to the second half of the fifteenth century.

Choir partitions were usually crowned by a monumental rood called the “triumphal cross”.<sup>56</sup> Both Lutheran Germany and Scandinavia possess a relatively large number of such crucifixes. In Germany, a concentration of medieval roods is found in and around the Elbe basin, for example in the cathedrals of Ratzeburg (Schleswig-Holstein), Havelberg (fig. 13), Halberstadt (fig. 11; both in Saxony-Anhalt), Meissen and Freiberg (both in Saxony).<sup>57</sup> In three parish churches in the town of Stendal (Saxony-Anhalt), namely St James,

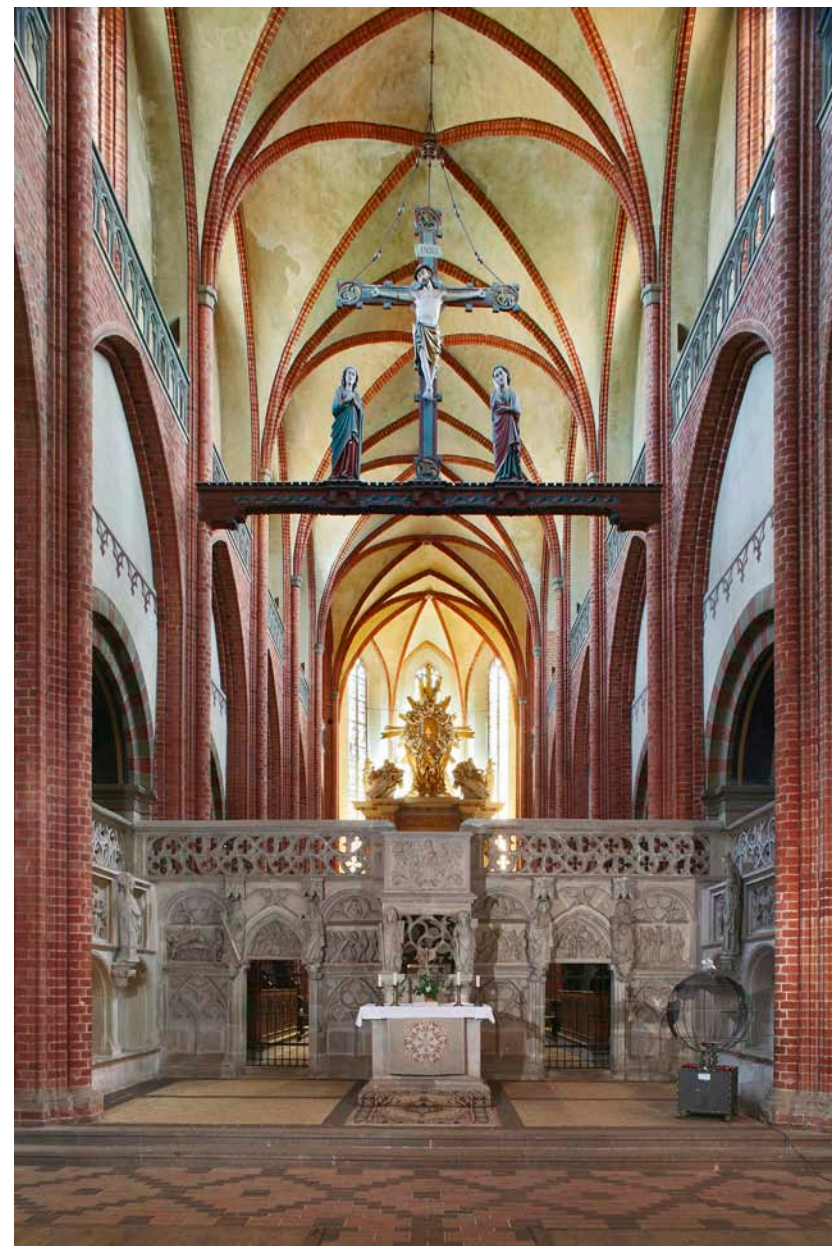


Fig. 13. Havelberg (Germany), cathedral, Calvary group, wood, c. 1300. Below: rood screen, stone, 1396–1411. Photo Justin Kroesen & Regnerus Steensma.



Fig. 14. Højer (Denmark), village church, interior looking east with a Calvary group in the triumphal arch, wood, c. 1250. Photo Justin Kroesen.

St Peter's and St Mary's, roods still occupy their position on top of medieval rood screens.<sup>58</sup> A second important concentration of surviving medieval roods and Calvary groups is found in Schleswig, especially in country churches, where they are found on both sides of the present German-Danish border.<sup>59</sup> They offer particularly rich evidence for their early development during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and moreover many specimens in this region survive in their original settings, for example in Rieseby (Germany) and Højer (Denmark) (fig. 14).<sup>60</sup> In Norway, roods are preserved more sporadically, and most are now in museums.<sup>61</sup> In Swe-

den, they are more numerous, with those in Scania and on Gotland having been studied most extensively.<sup>62</sup> A striking phenomenon among the medieval roods on the last mentioned island is the fact that a large number of examples from the thirteenth century are equipped with rings or discs, as is the case, for example, in the churches at Eskelhem, Fide, Stånga and Öja.<sup>63</sup>

#### *Elements in the nave*

It has traditionally been maintained that fixed pulpits were only introduced after the Reformation with its increased weight attached to preaching. In reality, however, these preaching devices gained ground in

medieval churches from at least the thirteenth century.<sup>64</sup> In Germany, between 200 and 230 medieval pulpits survive, mostly in Lutheran churches.<sup>65</sup> Of these extant pulpits, about three quarters are of stone while one quarter is made of wood. Examples are found in different parts of Germany, with a strong concentration of stone pulpits around the river Neckar in

Baden-Württemberg.<sup>66</sup> Together they enable the pulpit's development to be traced from the late Romanesque model in the Stiftskirche in Bücken (Lower Saxony) to the late Gothic example in St Anne's church in Annaberg (Saxony) which dates from 1516 (fig. 15). Most pulpits still occupy their original location on the south side of the nave and many show figures of the



Fig. 15. Annaberg (Germany), St Anne, pulpit, stone, 1516. Photo Justin Kroesen & Regnerus Steensma.



*Fig. 16. Urphar (Germany), St Jacob, interior looking east with benches, wood, 14th century?  
Photo Justin Kroesen & Regnerus Steensma.*

Church Fathers and other saints around the drum. The wealth of Lutheran Germany presents a stark contrast with the almost total absence of medieval pulpits in the Nordic countries. A fourteenth-century stone platform in Tirstrup (Jutland) could perhaps be interpreted as a rare example in Denmark, and in Vamlingbo on Swedish Gotland there is an opening in the transversal wall between chancel and nave which is accessible from the chancel and may also have been used for the delivery of sermons. It cannot be established if pulpits were less common here in the first place, or if they have rather massively fallen victim to post-Reformation renewals.

The rise of preaching in medieval churches brought about the need for fixed seats for the community to sit on during sermons. With the arrival of Protestantism church services would become even more of a seated affair, so that benches, where they served well, were sometimes maintained. In Germany, complete sets of benches have been preserved in several churches, the majority of which are now Lutheran. The oldest specimens, from around 1300, survive in the former Cistercian nunnery of Börstel (Lower Saxony), while later sets are found in Urphar (Baden-Württemberg) (fig. 16), possibly from the fourteenth century, and Kleinschwarzen-

lohe and Ruffenhofen (Bavaria), both from the fifteenth.<sup>67</sup> Closed pews with shallow carvings on the side panels survive in several churches including Manubach and Bechtolsheim (both in Rhine-land-Palatinate).<sup>68</sup> Such complete sets of wooden church benches are preserved nowhere in Scandinavia. However, some Nordic churches do provide evidence of seating in the nave in the shape of low benches running along the nave walls. In Garde on Swedish Gotland a stone bench against the north, west and south walls of the nave while in the stave church at Norwegian Torpo (Buskerud) (fig. 17) the bench against the north and west walls is made of wood.<sup>69</sup> The high, wide plinths at the foot of the nave pillars in Vamlingbo (Gotland) may also have provided seating for medieval churchgoers.<sup>70</sup> In addition, in Sweden and Norway, several moveable benches of medieval origins are

preserved of which the original function is unknown.<sup>71</sup>

Another element of central importance found in the nave of medieval churches was the side altar. These often privately founded altars could be located in separate chapels, along the walls of the nave, and in front of the rood screen and the nave pillars. In some late medieval churches their number amounted to several dozens.<sup>72</sup> Side altars lost their function with the arrival of the Reformation because Luther and his followers strongly opposed all kinds of private ritual. Nevertheless, examples survive in a considerable number of Lutheran churches in Germany. The richest extant pattern is found in St Laurence's in Nuremberg (Bavaria), where ten examples survive to date in chapels and against the nave pillars (fig. 18).<sup>73</sup> An example of a well-preserved chapel with an altar and retable and closed off by a wooden screen is the



*Fig. 17. Torpo (Norway), stave church, bench running along the north and west walls, wood, early 13th century. Photo Justin Kroesen.*



Fig. 18. Nuremberg (Germany), St Lawrence, the northern side aisle looking east with side altars, stone and wood, 15th century. Photo Justin Kroesen & Regnerus Steensma.

chapel of the Brömse-family on the south side of the nave of St Jacob's in Lübeck (Schleswig-Holstein).<sup>74</sup> In several smaller churches two side altars still occupy their original positions in the nave, most commonly on either side of the chancel arch. In St Wolfgang in Rothenburg ob der Tauber and in the church of St Vitus in Veitsbronn, both in Bavaria, the altars have preserved their late Gothic triptychs.<sup>75</sup> In the castle chapel of Neckarmühlbach (Baden-Württemberg) the altars and retables have been preserved in combination with two late Gothic altar ciboria that were built over them around 1500.

Patterns such as these are much less of-

ten found in Lutheran churches in Scandinavia, where side altars were more thoroughly removed after the Reformation.<sup>76</sup> However, two remarkable exceptions deserve to be mentioned. In Swedish Sankt Olof (Scania) the nave is filled with no less than four altars, of which three have retained their original altar furnishings.<sup>77</sup> On the altar in front of the eastern nave pillar is a late Gothic shrine (the wings have vanished) with an impressive height of 331 cm containing an older sculpture of the Throne of Grace from c. 1440 (fig. 19), while two further side altars at the north and south walls are equipped with smaller tabernacle shrines from the fifteenth cen-

ture showing the Virgin and Child and the Family of St Anne. The chancel of the parish church at Trondenes in northern Norway possesses a unique ensemble of three altars, all equipped with late Gothic winged retables, the freestanding high altar being flanked by two side altars in the eastern corners (fig. 20).<sup>78</sup> A concentration

of surviving side altars is found on Swedish Gotland, where around forty churches still possess the northern altar block while the southern one survives in some twenty cases.<sup>79</sup> Side altars of more modest execution seem to have been common in Denmark and Norway, with niches in the east wall of the nave serving this purpose. In Nor-



Fig. 19. Sankt Olof (Sweden), village and pilgrims' church, side altar in the nave with a tabernacle shrine, wood, early 16th century, containing the Throne of Grace, wood, c. 1440. Photo Justin Kroesen.



Fig. 20. Trondenes (Norway), village church, interior of the chancel looking east with high altar and two side altars, all with retables, stone and wood, late 15th and early 16th centuries. Photo Jiri Havran.

wegian Seljord and Bø, both in Telemark, stone slabs inserted in the round-arched niches served as altar *mensae*. Romanesque paintings inside such niches serving as modest altar retables are found in Mästerby on Swedish Gotland and Måløv on Danish Zealand.<sup>80</sup>

Baptismal fonts usually stood in the westernmost part of the nave of medieval churches, close to the entrance. Medieval fonts were generally maintained in Lutheran churches after the Reformation, both in Germany and in Scandinavia.<sup>81</sup> In terms of variety and decorations, however, the greatest wealth is found in Germany. Stone fonts in the Romanesque style, often with

rich carvings, are most commonly found in the north of the country, while the richest Gothic models survive in the south. In addition, many churches in northern Germany possess richly decorated fonts cast in bronze, called “Taufkessel”.<sup>82</sup> In some cases, explicitly Catholic iconographical programs on medieval fonts did not impede their survival, for example in St Mary’s in Stendal (Saxony-Anhalt) where the bowl of the bronze font from 1474 is surrounded by a row of saints, and in St Mary’s church at Reutlingen (Baden-Württemberg) where the sandstone font dating from 1499 carries sculpted depictions of the Seven Sacraments (fig. 21). Some Ro-

manesque fonts in Schleswig including Munkbrarup near Flensburg show fierce combat scenes between Good and Evil which hardly reflect Lutheran ideas surrounding baptism.<sup>83</sup> Most medieval fonts in Germany were moved after the Reformation from their original position eastward into the nave or to the chancel in or-

der to integrate the administration of baptism into communal Sunday worship.

Scandinavia’s medieval fonts, most of which date from the Romanesque period, are numerous but generally more sober than in Germany. With around 1600 extant examples in Denmark, implying a survival rate of around 86%, this country may



Fig. 21. Reutlingen (Germany), St Mary’s, baptismal font, stone, 1499. Photo Justin Kroesen & Regnerus Steensma.

even possess the densest medieval font landscape in Europe.<sup>84</sup> Here too, fonts occupy their original location only by way of exception since almost all were moved to the eastern part of the nave or into the chancel after the Reformation. The greatest wealth of medieval baptismal fonts with figurative carvings is – once again – offered by Swedish Gotland, whose ninety-one medieval country churches possess a total of eighty Romanesque and early Gothic stone fonts, which amounts to a survival rate of 73%.<sup>85</sup> The earliest fonts on Gotland, in the Romanesque style, stand out due to their exuberant sculptured decorations. The pedestals of the fonts in Etelhem, Gerum, Stånga, Vänge and elsewhere feature violent scenes of combat with snakes and other monsters threatening each other as well as helpless human beings and other creatures as an evocation of evil that snaps at the soul of the newly born. Many of the Gotland fonts are remarkable for their strong narrative element, their bowls and even the slanted undersides being entirely covered with reliefs depicting Biblical scenes. Another feature which makes the Gotland fonts stand out in the Lutheran context is the fact that many have maintained their original position on a podium in the western part of the nave (fig. 22).<sup>86</sup> In addition, some are still covered by their original lids.<sup>87</sup>

### Conclusions

From the above it may be concluded that the balance between surviving medieval church furnishings in Lutheran churches

in Germany and Scandinavia unambiguously tips toward Germany. Regarding the different categories of medieval churches, the difference between Germany and the Nordic countries is the largest with regard to former monasteries. Whereas these possess some of the most complete ensembles in Germany, including Blaubeuren, Döberan and Maulbronn, monastic churches rich in medieval furnishings are rather a rarity in Scandinavia, exceptions being Løgumkloster in Denmark and Vadstena in Sweden. Cathedrals offer a similar panorama with the “Domkirchen” of northern and eastern Germany being particularly outstanding, such as Halberstadt, Havelberg and Lübeck. Sweden no doubt offers the best competition, with valuable ensembles surviving in Lund, Strängnäs and Västerås. In urban parish churches, ensembles preserved in the Nordic countries do not even come close to Germany’s richest examples such as Annaberg (St Anne’s), Nuremberg (St Laurence’s and St Sebald’s), Rothenburg ob der Tauber (St Jacob’s), Schwäbisch Hall (St Michael’s) and Stendal (St Mary’s). The only category in which the wealth of Scandinavian churches rivals that of Germany is that of rural parish churches, particularly in parts of Denmark, in southern Sweden and – first and foremost – on Gotland.

Medieval survivals in German churches are generally richer and more varied than those in Scandinavian countries. With regard to altar decorations, Germany and Scandinavia are more or less on a par. Both possess a wealth of medieval altars and ret-



Fig. 22. Etelhem (Sweden), village church, interior looking east with baptismal font, stone, 12th century. Photo Justin Kroesen.

ables that is unparalleled in Europe, perhaps with the exception of eastern Spain. Although Germany's medieval altarpieces are more varied and show a wider iconographical variety, the Nordic countries offer richer evidence of their forerunners and early development with the survival of many altar frontals, wingless retables, and tabernacle shrines. Medieval Sacrament houses and choir stalls are much more often found in Germany, and the same is true of choir partitions. In turn, the category of roods offers a more balanced picture. With regard to elements in the nave, including pulpits and side altars, Germany again possesses by far the larger stock of preserved examples. Finally, baptismal fonts have survived in great numbers in both Germany and the Nordic countries, with Germany unambiguously offering the most complete overall panorama. Within Scandinavia, Gotland deserves special mention for its outstanding wealth of Romanesque font sculpture. The overall conclusion must be that Lutheran Germany's wealth of medieval church furnishings surpasses that of Scandinavia; apparently, the Reformation generally led to further-reaching implications for material culture in the Nordic countries than in Germany – at least some important parts.

On a critical note, it should be pointed out that comparing present-day Germany to the Scandinavian countries of today evidently implies a certain amount of anachronism, especially since medieval Germany never existed as a country. On a regional level, Scandinavia offers a number

of outstanding medieval church interiors, including Danish southern Jutland, Scania (which was a part of Denmark until it came under the Swedish crown in 1658), and Gotland. The almost one hundred country churches of this Baltic island arguably offer the best impression of what a furnished high-medieval church interior looked like – not only in Scandinavia, but in the whole of Europe. These mentioned medieval “Kunstlandschaften” can certainly be compared to Germany's richest regions, including Franconia and Saxony-Anhalt. On the other hand, outstanding ensembles such as at Doberan are exceptional also in the German context, and some parts of Lutheran Germany are even conspicuously poor in terms of medieval survivals, such as most of the states of Hesse and Württemberg. And finally, it should be pointed out that some individual churches in Scandinavia preserve unique medieval interior ensembles that are worth the trip (in Michelin-terms: “vaut le voyage”). Here, we may recall a number of churches mentioned, including Sankt Olof in Scania and Trondenes in northern Norway. The view of the chancel of the last mentioned church, Europe's northernmost preserved medieval building, is without parallel even among Germany's Lutheran churches (fig. 20).

## Notes

- 1 After Fritz 1997. On a critical note, it has been rightly observed, for instance, that many medieval objects have not been continuously present in church space but were stored away at some point after the Reformation, often over the church vaults, only to be reinstalled during the nineteenth or twentieth century.
- 2 The focus is on liturgical fittings; other relevant categories, such as building forms and parts, vault paintings, liturgical vessels (*vasa sacra*) and textiles have not been taken into account. I thank Ebbe Nyborg in Copenhagen, Stephan Kuhn in Bergen and Peter Tångeberg in Lärstringe for their critical reading of the manuscript.
- 3 The spread and variety of different categories of church furnishings is formulated in general terms, and specific examples are only mentioned when these are of significance to the entire understanding of their characteristics and development.
- 4 Kroesen 2005, Kroesen 2017.
- 5 In order to avoid confusion with the Roman Catholic Church after the Counter-Reformation, the British historian Eamon Duffy uses the useful term “traditional religion” to describe the Catholic church of the Middle Ages (Duffy 1992). In this article, however, I will maintain the term Catholic to designate the medieval church under Rome.
- 6 See, for example: Heal 2005, Michalski 1993.
- 7 Schmidt 1997.
- 8 See now: Weilandt et al. 2018.
- 9 Meller et al. 2008.
- 10 See especially: Schleif 1990.
- 11 On surviving interior fittings in rural churches across Europe, see: Kroesen et al. 2012.
- 12 Many Danish churches are described in detail in the ongoing book series *Danmarks kirker* that was started in 1933. All the churches of Gotland are briefly described in German in Lagerlöf et al. 1991. A survey of the unique medieval church interiors of Gotland in English is still a *desideratum*.
- 13 The impact of the Reformation on Gotland's churches was studied by Staecker 2007.
- 14 For England: Duffy 1992. A useful panorama on this process in Switzerland and France is provided by Dupeux et al. 2000. Iconoclastic rages also occurred occasionally in Germany, especially in the Southwest.
- 15 For a brief analysis of this process, see: Mullett 1999.
- 16 For this process in Germany, see: Engelberg 2005. Exceptions to the rule exist, of course, including Kalkar (St Nicholas') and Xanten (St Victor's), both on the Lower Rhine.
- 17 On the destruction of medieval art in France, see: Réau 1959.
- 18 Münzenberger et al. 1885–1890. Interestingly, both authors were Catholic priests. The best European overview of the evolution of extant medieval altars remains: Braun 1924.
- 19 Wolf 2002.
- 20 I am indebted to Peter Tångeberg and Ebbe Nyborg for their information.
- 21 The same can roughly be said of retables in Northern Germany.
- 22 On such processes, see now: Wangsgaard Jürgensen 2018.
- 23 See: Plahter et al. 2004.
- 24 Jørgensen 1991.
- 25 The examples from Lisbjerg and Odder are now in the National Museum in Copenhagen while the one in Sahl is still in the church. The classical study of these altars is Nørlund 1968 (1926). See also: Jørn et al. 2000.
- 26 Andersen 2015. The shrine from Urjala is now in the National Museum in Helsinki (Inv. nr KM 4563:1) and the one from Frösögö is preserved in the Historical Museum in Stockholm (Inv. nr 14965), while the example from Hedalen, although dismantled, survives in the local stave church.
- 27 These statistics were collected by Peter Tångeberg

- and myself in the context of an ongoing research project on this type of altar decoration.
- 27 Examples are found in the churches of Ardre, Lojsta, Sundre, Tofta, Träkumla, Vallstena and Vamlingbo. In addition, the Historical Museum in Stockholm possesses an eighth example from Ganthem. See: Tångeberg 2005.
- 28 See: Jacobs 1998.
- 29 See for a survey: Boodt et al. 2007.
- 30 In Germany, most Southern Netherlandish altarpieces are found in the – predominantly Catholic – Rhineland.
- 31 Leeuwenberg 1959, Olstad 2013, Kausland 2017.
- 32 Inv. nr 20504. In Borbjerg and Vejrum the triptych was inserted in a later altarpiece after the Reformation.
- 33 One such altarpiece is preserved in the church of St Mary in Danzig, present-day Gdańsk in Poland, turned Lutheran during the sixteenth century.
- 34 See: King 1965.
- 35 The most comprehensive survey of this topic is Timmermann 2009.
- 36 Several further examples are kept at the Historical Museum in Stockholm, from Överjärna (Södermanland), Tryde (Scania) and Väte (Gotland).
- 37 Kroesen et al. 2014.
- 38 Kroesen 2018.
- 39 See: King 1965.
- 40 Scholarly interest in choir stalls has a long tradition in Germany. Early surveys include Neugass 1927 and Busch 1928.
- 41 See: Loose 1931 and Kroesen et al. 2012, 155–167.
- 42 The latter occurred in Blaubeuren and Maulbronn, both in Baden-Württemberg, for example. In the Nordic countries, practically all monasteries were not only closed down but also demolished at the behest of the monarchy.
- 43 Kroesen et al. 2012, 164–166. A number of stalls in Danish village churches are known to have been transferred from dissolved monasteries.
- 44 The largest number of medieval screens (now) without lofts are found in England, where they are estimated to amount to more than five hundred. See: Bucklow, et al. 2017.
- 45 See: Schmelzer 2004 (with catalogue on pp. 166–195) and Jung 2013.
- 46 Untermann 1996.
- 47 On the East Frisian screens, see: Kroesen et al. 2011, 165–171.
- 48 For a study of screens – or rather their absence – in Sweden, see: Nilsén 2003.
- 49 See: Nyborg 2017.
- 50 Inv. nr 17274.
- 51 Hoff 2003. Similar screens in England include Kirkstead (Lincolnshire), Stanton Harcourt (Oxfordshire) and Thurcaston (Leicestershire).
- 52 Hoff 1991, Schjetlein Johannessen 1962.
- 53 For Tingvoll, see: Hoff 2006.
- 54 This type of access is characteristic of English medieval churches.
- 55 The latter (Inv. nr T 4652,2) originally belonged to the church at Horg (Trøndelag).
- 56 Ebbe Nyborg has proposed the useful term “chancel arch crucifix” (in German: “Chorbogenkruzifix”), see: Nyborg 2001, 25.
- 57 On early roods and Calvary groups (1100–1300), see: Beer 2005 (with catalogue on pp. 495–840) and Lutz 2004.
- 58 The screen in St Peter’s is of brick while the screens in St Jacob’s and St Mary’s are of wood with iron trellises.
- 59 On medieval church furnishings in Schleswig-Holstein, see: Teuchert 1978.
- 60 See: Nyborg 2001, Wangsgaard Jürgensen 2018, Plate XXXVIII.
- 61 Blindheim 1998, Hohler 2017.
- 62 Liepe 1995, Wolska 1997. On Swedish medieval wooden sculpture, see: Andersson 1966, Andersson 1980, Tångeberg 1989.
- 63 On this type of rood, see: Wolska 1997, Nyborg 2001. These ring and disc crosses are hardly paralleled in Germany. A rare disc cross from c. 1230 is found in the church of St. Maria zur Höhe in Soest (Westphalia).
- 64 Kroesen et al. 2012, 234–261. In Italy a number of twelfth-century pulpits are preserved.
- 65 Numbers mentioned by Rademacher 1921, 141.
- 66 Halbauer 1997.
- 67 On medieval benches in rural parish churches, see: Kroesen et al. 2012, 262–283.
- 68 The last mentioned church became Protestant in 1544 and has been a *simultaneum* serving both the Lutheran and the Catholic communities since 1685.
- 69 Traces of similar fixtures were discovered in several churches on Danish Zealand, including Blistrup and Gundsømagle, see: Olsen 1967. In general on seating in Danish medieval churches, see: Skov 1979.
- 70 Similar pillar bases are also found in several English churches, see: Kroesen et al. 2012, 265–266.
- 71 Examples are found in Eskelhem, Hejdeby and Tofta, all on Gotland, and from Rennebu in Trøndelag, now in the University Museum of Bergen (Inv. nr MA 40).
- 72 On side altars in medieval churches, see: Kroesen 2010a.
- 73 Schleif 1990. The influence of the wealthy patriachs who had founded these altars shortly before the Reformation certainly played an important role in their preservation. Medieval side altars with their original retables are rare today in Catholic churches too. The wealth of St Laurence’s in Nuremberg is paralleled in Catholic Germany only by St Victor’s in Xanten and St Nicholas’ in Kalkar, both on the Lower Rhine.
- 74 Kroesen 2010a, 59–62.
- 75 On such patterns, see: Kroesen 2010a, 95–112. Parallels are only rarely found in Catholic churches, examples being the village church of Pipping and the castle chapel of Blutenburg, both in the outskirts of Munich.
- 76 On vanished side altars in Danish churches, see: Bisgaard 2001.
- 77 Altars and their furnishings in southern Sweden were studied by Karlsson 2015.
- 78 Von Bonsdorff 2015.
- 79 Numbers taken from Stolt 2001, 55. On side altars on Gotland, see: Kroesen 2010b.
- 80 Further Danish examples of painted side altar niches include Butterup (Zealand), Hvorslev (Jutland), Stenlille (Zealand) and Tørring (Jutland).
- 81 For a survey, see: Drake 2002.
- 82 On medieval fonts in Germany, see: Schlegel 2012.
- 83 Schleswig stretches over both sides of the present German-Danish border, and fonts of a similar type are also found in Danish southern Jutland.
- 84 On Danish fonts, see: Mackeprang 1941, on their survival: Wangsgaard Jürgensen 2018.
- 85 The first study of the medieval fonts of Gotland was Roosval 1918. Romanesque and, above all, Gothic fonts from Gotland were also exported widely, especially around the Baltic Sea, see: Berggren 2002.
- 86 On these aspects, see: Fåhraeus 1974.
- 87 Medieval font lids are found in Bro, Endre and Hejdeby. They also occur in some Norwegian stave churches, including Hedalen and Øye, both in Oppland.



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