

Gendered Sites of Touch and Sound: Medieval Croziers through the Senses

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Abstract

From an art historical perspective medieval croziers – pastoral staffs – are mostly understood as visible expressions of authority and thus as objects to be studied visually. For historians the same object may foremost an insignia appearing in normative texts. This talk, however, attempts to understand croziers in the hands of bishops and abbesses as sites of touch and sound. It is the staff itself that invokes and even negotiate sensory experiences. Material culture triggers the eye, invites to be touched by the hands and lips, can emit smell, and produces sound. I do not attempt to systematize the ways the senses were understood in the Middle Ages, nor to uncover long-term changes in sensory perception. Yet we will see that similar artefacts were likely experienced differently, depending on ritual and gender. This talk is an attempt to foreground the physical engagement with one specific artefact in order to understand better men and women's lived experiences.