

Article

# The Use of Devotional Objects in Catalan Homes during the Late Middle Ages

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this article is to study domestic devotion in Catalonia in the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, based on the information provided by numerous post-mortem inventories and texts written by coetaneous spiritual authors such as Ramon Llull, Francesc Eiximenis and Saint Vincent Ferrer. Among the objects recorded in the inventories, pieces of furniture and devotional objects laypeople and clergymen used in their pious practices as “material” aid for personal prayer stood out. They were in keeping with the strong visual culture that pervaded the Late Middle Ages. There were retables, oratories and images of religious themes. However, the inventories also listed lesser known but equally recurring objects such as *paternosters* and *Agni Dei*. Painted cloths depicting religious scenes that decorated the homes of numerous wealthy Catalan-Aragonese families at that time were also present. Spiritual books such as books of hours and psalters, biblical texts, *Legenda Aurea*, etc., were mentioned as well. They were part of the incipient libraries of the laity in the Late Middle Ages.

**Keywords:** domestic devotion; private devotion; material devotion; medieval art; altarpieces; retables; oratories; reliquaries; paternosters; Agnus Dei; Catalonia

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## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

When it dawned on Evast that his son excelled at science, was well brought up and good-mannered, his heart filled with joy. He entered their home chapel, where Aloma and he secretly prayed to God and listened to mass every day. After getting up from the table, they went there to offer thanks to God. The altarpiece was of Saint Andrew, whom Evast and Aloma deeply trusted to grant them God’s grace and blessings. Inside the prayer room, Evast knelt down before the altar and made the sign of the cross as he usually did, saying the following words...”. (Llull 1981–1982, p. 39)

This passage from the *Llibre d’Evast i Blanquerna* by Ramon Llull illustrates the life of a couple, Evast and Aloma, whom the prolific Majorcan theologian introduces to his contemporaries as exemplary witnesses of Christian life. In addition to the Lullian utopia that pervades the book, the words of the Majorcan portray the religious practices in the lives of laypeople in the late medieval period: attending mass on a daily basis and praying together several times a day in their private chapel. Furthermore, Llull stresses Evast and Aloma’s attitudes, which are shown as an expression of their faith: secret and sincere prayer, thanks offering and trust in God and the saints. Those attitudes are also reflected in the positions they adopt: they kneel before the altar and make the sign of the cross. All of this takes place in a domestic environment where the private chapel, in which the altar was dominated by the framed

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<sup>1</sup> Text revised by Ann Swinnen.

altarpiece of Saint Andrew, was a place that evidenced the importance of this personal, private, and emotional devotion praised by the Majorcan writer.

Llull's text also beautifully portrays those places of domestic devotion which are, together with devotional objects, the purpose of the present article. Those private places of religious practice are the settings of the daily piety of laypeople. They contain a broad assortment of objects used as physical and visual support for laypeople's prayers or as a tool or an aid in their prayers. The growing number of those devotional objects found in post-mortem inventories of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries can be explained by the development of private piety encouraged by preachers from their pulpits. This was fully in line with the spirituality fostered by mendicant orders and later, by the influence of the *Devotio Moderna*.

Domestic devotion in the Late Middle Ages remains largely unexplored, although its interest and importance are unquestionable. This article aims to portray some of the characteristics of domestic devotion in Catalonia in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, based on the abundant information provided by post-mortem inventories published. The objective is to make an initial approach to the study of the devotional objects listed in inventories and of religious practice with the help of texts written by Catalan-Aragonese theologians and religious authors of that period. Further research including the analysis of extensive chronological series of inventories concerning protocol or parish archives will have to be carried out in the future.

## 2. *Post-Mortem Inventories as a Documentary Source for Art History*

The present study was carried out by scrutinising post-mortem inventories of Catalan laypeople from the thirteenth century to the year 1500. The use of post-mortem inventories as a documentary source for socio-economic studies is a widely employed method in medieval and modern historiography. This kind of legal document intends to record the belongings of the deceased that are handed over to their heirs following the testamentary dispositions. Not all the objects of the home were itemised, only the possessions of the deceased. Actually, during the period between the deceased's death and making the inventory, it was possible that certain objects were moved from one place to another or disappeared. The inventories only listed the belongings of the deceased, often the *pater familias*, the head of the family, omitting those of the spouse or other members of the family.<sup>2</sup> Inventories of women were much less common than those of men. Of a total of eighty-five inventories analysed, only seventeen were of women. The limitations and incompleteness of the inventories therefore need to be considered although they offer a highly reliable portrait of the life, habits and customs of men and women in the Late Middle Ages.

Given the legal nature of inventories, notaries were responsible for making descriptions that allowed identifying the objects for them to be donated to the heir. The objects were accurately listed providing any additional information that clarified the objects' identification such as the material, size, age or condition. Notaries could even estimate their value. A summary description of the iconography was also made in the case of images, retables and oratories. The inventories could be complemented with the transcription of the auction, that is, the sale of the objects auctioned in the public market. This last document enables us to know the final price of the sale of each object.

Other interesting information for art historians is the location of the possessions. When compiling the inventory, the notary usually walked through the different rooms of the house indicating the room in which the objects were found. In each room, he started by listing furniture, including beds, tables, benches, storage benches, boxes and safes, itemising the objects stored inside.

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<sup>2</sup> For the analysis of post-mortem inventories as a primary source for the study of material culture, see the recent and complete study by Almenar about Valencia including the state of the question (Almenar Fernández 2017). See also: (Lencina Pérez 1998; Sobrado Correa 2003; Bolós and Sánchez-Boira 2015).

From the late nineteenth century onwards but more so since the 1980s, Catalan medievalists such as Soler i Palet (1916a, 1916b)<sup>3</sup>; Roca (1923, Roca 1927–1928a, Roca 1927–1928b, 1930a, 1930b); Batlle Gallart (1981a, 1986, 1988, 1993, Batlle Gallart 1993–1994, 1998, Batlle Gallart et al. 1989, Batlle Gallart and Cuadrada 1993); Bolós and Sànchez-Boira (2014) amongst many others, have carried out the patient task of analysing and transcribing post-mortem inventories of citizens belonging to the different estates of Catalan society in order to study social and economic aspects of life in the late medieval period.

The publication and analysis of inventories, either through full or partial transcription, provide us with first-order information about religious practices in the Late Middle Ages, this being the starting point of our work. So far, the references made to religiosity have been complementary to more global considerations on social or economic aspects. Authors such as Sabaté (1990, pp. 91–92); García Marsilla (2001, pp. 170–82); Bolós and Sànchez-Boira (2014, pp. 236–41) have introduced commentaries that are the basis of future studies on domestic devotion. In the field of history of art and private piety, post-mortem inventories have been examined in-depth by Valencian and Majorcan historians such as García Marsilla (2001); Sastre Moll (2003). In Catalonia, studies of this genre have not addressed the artistic side, except for Aurell i Cardona and A. Puigarnau, who have analysed the case of Catalan merchants (Aurell i Cardona and Puigarnau 1995; Aurell i Cardona 1995), R. Terés, who has explored the historical and mythological iconography of retables and oratories (Terés 1998) and Amenós' work (Amenós 2017).

The basis of our study corresponds to eighty-five published inventories of Catalan citizens from the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.<sup>4</sup> There are both complete inventories and partial ones that only list a specific type of object. Of the total of eighty-five inventories analysed, three correspond to the thirteenth century, twelve to the fourteenth century and the rest to the fifteenth century. Most of them are inventories of citizens that belonged to the so-called *braç reial* or *braç popular*, both in the upper estate (honourable citizens) and in the lower one (merchants, artists and craftsmen). The inventories of monarchs and members of the royal family as well as the inventories of ecclesiastical residents who resided in their own house such as canons and secular clergy (rectors and presbyters that were beneficiaries of parishes) were left out. However, their devotional objects were in line with those reflected in the laypeople's inventories.<sup>5</sup>

### 3. Observations Regarding the Term Domestic Devotion

In recent medieval and modern historiography, the use of the term “domestic devotion” has imposed itself over expressions such as “private devotion”, which may present serious biases if applied to the Middle Ages considering the current meaning of private.<sup>6</sup>

Modern houses, in which separate rooms for its members provide privacy, have little in common with medieval homes, which consisted of a series of rooms where a large group of people sharing bedrooms, dining rooms, kitchens and other rooms lived together. Today's nuclear family is composed of parents and children. In the Late Middle Ages, in the case of well-off families, it used to include grandparents, married children, widowed daughters and other close relatives as well as the servants

<sup>3</sup> Groundbreaking work that includes the transcription of dozens of inventories. It gathered only “artistic” objects, leaving out reliquaries, books, etc.

<sup>4</sup> These inventories have been published by: (Martorell and Valls i Taverner 1911–1912; Moliné 1912, 1922a, 1922b; Soler i Palet 1916a, 1916b; Roca 1923, Roca 1927–1928a, Roca 1927–1928b, 1930a, 1930b; Casas Homs 1970; Duran i Sanpere 1972–1975; Vinyoles 1976; Conde y Delgado de Molina 1977; Batlle i Prats 1978; Costa 1983; García Panardes 1983; Batlle Gallart 1981a, 1986, 1988, 1993, Batlle Gallart 1993–1994, 1994, 1998; Broida 1986–1987; Batlle Gallart et al. 1989; Plana i Borràs 1989; López Pizcueta 1992; Ortí i Gost 1994; Batlle Gallart and Cuadrada 1993; Cifuentes i Comamala 2000; Busqueta 2001; Fité 2001; Bolós and Sànchez-Boira 2014).

<sup>5</sup> Regarding the inventories of the clergy, see: (Sànchez-Boira 2007, 2014). For Italy, see: (Cossar 2017).

<sup>6</sup> For domestic devotion in the Middle Ages, see: (Webb 1990, pp. 159–73; Rigon 2001; Spicer and Hamilton 2005; Webb 2005, pp. 27–42; Goldberg and Kowaleski 2009, pp. 1–13; Kolpacoff Deane 2013, pp. 65–75; Smith 2014; Laugerud et al. 2016). Regarding the fifteenth century, see: (Corry et al. 2017, 2019).

and even slaves, who shared bedrooms with the families in the limited space of houses back then. Given this situation, it is difficult to apply the term “privacy” to medieval homes in the contemporary sense of the word. The terms “personal” or “individual”, reflecting the character of domestic practices, cannot be applied either. Although devotion could be experienced at an individual level, praying or performing rites often involved the whole family or the members of the household. Another apparent opposition is found in the terms “sacred” and “secular” in relation to homes. These are secular spaces but can become sacred in the presence of religious objects that grant the status of sacred to certain rooms or corners of the house, thus turning them into ideal spaces for devotional practice.

Domestic devotion is the expression that best fits the practice of piety at home and it avoids dichotomies that have been shown to be limited and confusing, such as those of public and private, sacred and secular or individual and collective (Kolpacoff Deane 2013, pp. 66–67, 70). When these words are used in the context of medieval homes, a certain amount of flexibility is necessary as their meanings may be overlapping or complementary (Corry et al. 2019, p. 2). Not surprisingly, recent historiography has emphasized that fluidity is a central concept in the definition of domesticity (Corry et al. 2019, p. 2).

Sixten Ringbom defined private devotion as the “devotion in private life, which is the personal relationship that the individual maintains with the Divine” (Ringbom 1997, p. 32). Today, we could enrich this definition or, at least, its practical dimension by saying: “those pious practices that medieval men and women perform in their domestic environment and which are an expression of their religious beliefs.” Yet what does this domestic devotion consist of? What elements integrate it and help build and shape it? In a recent study, Erin J. Campbell, Stephanie R. Miller and Elizabeth Carroll point out that “domesticity” is made up of spaces, objects and people (Campbell et al. 2013, p. 1). When applied to domestic devotion, it provides us with a useful means for the study of domestic devotion: it is framed within a space, the home; its people are the inhabitants living in the homes and a series of devotional objects represent the material support. It goes without saying that “devotion” is not limited to the materiality of religious practices or experiences. These are merely the external expression of the personal relationship of man with the Divine, a relationship marked by religious beliefs and, in particular, of the conception of God and the holy figures that men have in each historical period. This conception evolves and achieves specific forms and connotations over time. As mentioned above, domestic devotion in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries is marked by the spirituality that extends to the west from the mid-twelfth century and that has its final point in the *Devotio Moderna*.<sup>7</sup> For this reason, a global study of domestic devotion must necessarily study the foundations on which lay devotion is built in the framework of the spirituality of the moment: the preaching from the pulpit of the churches aimed at citizens and religious texts (as well as the images accompanying them) that begin to constitute the support of pious readings.

#### 4. Pious Practices of Laypeople in the Domestic Environment in the Late Middle Ages

The objective of this section is to contextualize the private expressions of lay devotion based on texts by authors at the time of the Crown of Aragon.

A prolific and influential Franciscan Catalan writer, Francesc Eiximenis (1330–1409), provides some interesting considerations on the environments that were appropriate for personal prayer in the *Llibre de les dones* (Book of women):

“Teach us our reverent Saviour that not only the church is a place to pray, but also the home itself. Hidden corners and obscure places are suitable as places to pray (...). And this prayer, at home, anyone can do it when they please, no one can be excused”. (Eiximenis 1981, vol. 2, p. 508)

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<sup>7</sup> For a study on medieval spirituality: (Delaruelle 1975; Vauchez 2003, 2005, Vauchez 2006).

Similar words are addressed to Queen Maria de Luna (1357–1406) in *Scala Dei* where he recommends her the quietness of a private space in the palace as an ideal environment for prayer:

“These wise men say that the most appropriate time for this is at night during the first wake, and even better during the second one, which is the dawn. However, sometimes someone can be in a place where contemplation is possible at another time. The place should be in the room, in the secret oratory or in the church, but in general, royal people have a chapel where they can pray secretly”. (Eiximenis 1985, p. 9)

Saint Vincent Ferrer (1350–1419), a famous and popular Valencian Dominican preacher who lived during the same period as Eiximenis, expressed himself in the same terms when, in one of his sermons, he portrays a Christian life programme that helps achieve eternal life:

“And how? First, when Sunday comes, they go to Mass, they fast, and go to confession. They do not talk to anyone and do not leave Mass until the priest gives blessings. Every morning and evening they pray devoutly, etc.; Then, when Lent comes, at the beginning they go to confession, and then they go often every month, and commune ten or twelve times a year; then they often do penance, they do not wear shirts, but serge and cilices, etc.”. (Ferrer 1932–1998, vol. 2, p. 81)

Both eminent preachers and theologians claimed that the private space was an optimal environment for daily personal prayer, a practice they strongly recommended in addition to participating in the sacraments the Church prescribed as a mandatory exercise from the Fourth Council of Lateran (1215). Canon 21 of the Council approved mandatory confession and annual communion for all Christians.<sup>8</sup> Logically, the most common frame of religious life and the centre of the administration of the sacraments remained the church, the sacred and liturgical space par excellence.<sup>9</sup> Parishes especially, but increasingly also the preaching of mendicants, put special emphasis on the personal practice of prayer that requires environments characterised by stillness and seclusion.<sup>10</sup>

Eiximenis and Ferrer refer to the domestic space for seclusion, silence and serenity to propitiate a personal relationship with God, which they consider ideal. They recommend laypeople to perform morning and evening prayers in this quiet environment.

“The devotee Petrus Damiani advised every Christian to, at least in the morning, upon rising, and in the evening, before going to bed, kneel down in a familiar and secret manner in his room, and say to our Lord God with all his heart: “I stand before You, God and Lord. I am the worst creature you have created, begging you God Most High that, through the merits of the precious death of your Glorious Son, please forgive me my sins and point out my bad life. Guide me and show me the right path””. (Eiximenis 1981, vol. 2, p. 514)

What does the content and purpose of this prayer refer to? The highest form of Christian prayer is contemplative prayer, which consists in deep intimacy of the devotee with God, a personal relationship

<sup>8</sup> (Vauchez 1993, pp. 104–105; Webb 2005, p. 28; Tanner and Watson 2006). The prescriptions of the fourth Lateran Council involve strengthening the role of parishes in the Middle Ages. Canon 21 therefore specifies that laypeople had to confess to proper priests, thus stressing the function of *cura animarum* of the parish rectors (Vauchez 2003, p. 184). The same author points out that it was not common for laypeople to confess in the fourteenth century, except once a year (Vauchez 1993, p. 104). Attending mass on Sunday was also supposed to be common practice. However, daily communion was only for elites and the royal family. Ramon Llull, however, explains Evast and Aloma practised daily communion. In addition to Confession and the Eucharist, the laity also had access to Baptism, Confirmation, Marriage and Anointing of the sick, sacraments that accompanied people in the Middle Ages throughout their existence from birth to death. They helped them sanctify important times of life such as marriage, illness and death. The places where they received those sacraments were usually in the church but homes were also an appropriate space in cases of illness or when death was near.

<sup>9</sup> The religious texts explain it clearly. Francesc Eiximenis specifies: “According to the saints, the church is a suitable and recommended place to pray” (Eiximenis 1981, vol. 2, p. 505).

<sup>10</sup> The significance of the civic and social dimension of faith during the late medieval period, expressed by means of processions, festive celebrations of important events in the liturgical calendar, and religious actions practised collectively by members of guilds and brotherhoods, may not be overlooked.

that involves a union of knowledge and life in which neither physical or imaginative resources nor words or images are required. However, for laypeople or for those who undertake the initial stages of the life of prayer, theologians recommend the practice of vocal prayer and mental prayer, which use texts that stimulate contemplation. It is not in vain that repeating the Paternoster, the Ave Maria and the Creed is encouraged as Saint Vincent Ferrer did from the pulpit. The powerful words of the Valencian Dominican show how vocal prayer encourages the recreation of the inner image of Jesus himself:

“And do you want to put it into practice? Tell me, you, man or woman: have you done any good deed today? You will answer: “Yes, sir, this morning, before leaving home. I prayed kneeling on the floor; joining my hands and elevating my thoughts to God. I prayed the Creed, the Paternoster, the Ave Maria, and I said the prayer to my Guardian Angel, as well as the Salve Regina. I prayed the Paternoster and the Ave Maria for the dead, thinking that I saw Jesus Christ and that He looked at me with an angry face because of my sins”. (Ferrer 1932–1998, vol. 1, p. 60)

Inner strength, imagination and memory play an important role as they help bring Christians close to eternal realities, awakening their understanding and touching their hearts (Laugerud et al. 2016, pp. 1–6; Hamm 2016, pp. 10–11). Recreating the image of Jesus, as well as that of the Virgin and the saints, fosters empathy in people and it spiritually connects them to the feelings of joy and pain that filled the heart of Mary and her Son. This category of images corresponds to what St. Augustine calls “spiritual vision”, which is different from the strictly corporeal one perceived by the senses and from intellectual vision. Saint Bernard considered those mental representations as a gift of God that contributed to elevating the soul and that were beneficial to people who could not achieve intellectual contemplation without images.

Apart from this common resource for vocal prayer and inner recreation of spiritual images, direct contemplation of images, whatever their support, also leads to fostering feelings of love for God and attitudes of contrition and adoration. Again, Saint Vincent Ferrer provides a good example of how images encourage contrition and repentance and thus promote sincere devotion uniting the devotee with Jesus Christ, the objective of Christian prayer.

“The second danger is from the soul, that is: when you want contrition for the sins committed and cannot have it, what should you do? I will tell you: stand in front of the crucifix, kneel down and, looking at it intently, devoutly make the sign of the cross on your heart and say: “Jesus! Jesus! Jesus!” many times; If you do so, you will feel you will receive what you ask for. And this is significant in the Passion of Jesus Christ, when he says that stones will break: your heart, hardened like a stone by sins, will break when you utter the name of Jesus; Then the monuments will open: you will see your monument will open to confession, regardless of how serious your sins are”. (Ferrer 1932–1998, vol. 2, p. 63)

In the text of Saint Vincent Ferrer, crucifixes play an important role of empathy. Ringbom suggests that images, in addition to educational and cultural functions, as pointed out by Gregory the Great, may perform an empathic function (Ringbom 1997, pp. 10–11, Belting 2009, pp. 547–60). In this regard, the term “devotional image” refers to a portable piece of religious art that is painted, sometimes on both sides, and is designed to decorate the altar of a church, an oratory or a chapel, fits perfectly into the typology and iconography of numerous late medieval images that try to cause an emotional impact on the devotee in private contemplation (Belting 1981, Wirth 1989, Panofsky 1997, Ringbom 1997, p. 32, Russo 1996, Belting 2009, pp. 545–605). Devotional images are thus representations that seek to generate empathy and influence the heart and intellect of the believer who contemplates them.

Against this background, the lawfulness of venerating images can again be considered. Saint Vincent Ferrer justifies the Christian attitude towards images following the western theological tradition saying that professed veneration falls directly on God himself, the Virgin and the saints:<sup>11</sup>

“And when you go to church, or elsewhere, outside the church, and you see an image of our Lord God, or of the Virgin Mary, or of the saints, which is made of gold, then you will love the image for the love of the one who is represented. Even if it is silver, or iron, or lead, or stone, or painted with a brush, or white, or black, you will bow. This, and even better, is what you will have to do”. (Ferrer 1932–1998, vol. 1, p. 245)

Eiximenis and Saint Vincent Ferrer give special importance to body language in prayer, taking as a reference Jesus’ evangelical example.

“I have searched if Jesus had other ways of praying, and I found that indeed other ways of praying exist. There are four. The first one consists in lifting one’s eyes, the second one in joining one’s hands, the third one in kneeling on both knees, the fourth one in lying stretched out on the ground”. (Ferrer 1932–1998, vol. 1, p. 21)

Eiximenis vividly describes the propitious prayer of Jesus:

“And here, kneeling, he first glorified and testified to his Father. Secondly, he begged him to forgive us our sins. To obtain abundant mercy, grace of the kingdom of God, he rose from the ground praying, and then he kneeled and threw himself flat on the ground humiliating himself to the Father, bending over, lifting his eyes and hands to heaven. He screamed loudly, so that everything poured out of him, and with all his effort and power and thought, emptied of his essence, he fell to the ground. He showed his humanity, giving us an example of how we must worship all our will, knowledge and effort, so that our prayer, thus reinforced, reaches God Almighty”. (Eiximenis 1981, vol. 2, p. 503)

Although he does not express a preference for any of the attitudes, he always mentions the spirit must be devoted (Figure 1): “Whether you are kneeling or standing, or at times kneeling and other times standing, depending on what position feels more comfortable and which one you are more devoted to” (Eiximenis 1981, vol. 2, p. 503), he recommends the Queen:

“The second point is that when the Queen is in this place at the right time, she has to withdraw and thus get away from other people, kneel and lift her hands and eyes and worship our Lord as follows”. (Eiximenis 1985, p. 9)

All these excerpts from texts and preaching sermons from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries illustrate the strength of “visual culture” in the late medieval spirituality as well as the importance of personal, private prayer of the faithful Christian to God. The solitude of an interior space, the repetition of vocal prayers and the contemplation of images encourage prayer seeking union with God through participation in feelings of joy and pain, repentance and worship. The power this visual culture reaches in the Late Middle Ages in the sermons of preachers like Saint Vincent Ferrer, whose sermons brought together thousands of people in the public spaces of large cities in the southwest of Europe, can thus be understood.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Saint Joan Damascè justifies the lawfulness of images because the veneration attributed to them results in their prototypes (Ringbom 1995; 1997, p. 10). Saint Thomas Aquinas and Saint Bonaventura support this idea (Cristologia 3, qu. 25 art 3, Saint Bonaventura Sent. 1h, III, 9, I, qu 2 conl 2 (quoted in Ringbom 1997, p. 10).

<sup>12</sup> Regarding the visual culture of Saint Vincent Ferrer: (Español 2019).



**Figure 1.** Saint Catherine praying before an image of Our Lady (second half of the 14th century). Metropolitan Museum of Art.

## 5. Urban Houses

Today we have detailed knowledge of medieval Catalan houses thanks to the information provided by post-mortem inventories and other documentary sources of a legal nature. Several studies have examined the structure and layout of the houses offering an accurate picture of urban and rural houses at that time<sup>13</sup>. Said studies stress that the size and layout of the houses depended on their location. In cities, the houses were usually small due to the limited urban space available within the city walls. In rural surroundings, there was more space.

The homes of the well-off classes, such as traders, merchants or bankers, were single-family houses in which a considerable number of people lived together. Couples with small children and/or unmarried children, sometimes married children and their offspring, other close relatives and servants, often slaves, all lived under the same roof. The houses consisted of a ground floor and a first floor on top of which there was an attic, one or more rooms and a terrace. The ground floor housed a workshop, warehouses, cellars, stables and pens<sup>14</sup> that were sometimes complemented in the back by a courtyard or a vegetable garden. The stairs to the upper floor were situated near the front door. In urban homes, which were called *albergs*, houses or *domus* (Batlle Gallart and Vinyoles 2002, pp. 109–10) in the documentation, family life was normally spent on the first floor, which contained several rooms. In the houses of wealthy families, there were up to fifteen rooms forming a network of rooms and backrooms of various sizes. The spaces dedicated to food were the kitchen, which often included a pantry, and a dining room that was also used for other family functions. The bedrooms were frequently shared. The head of the family usually had a study room, a place to work, nearby. There were also other small rooms such as rooms to knead bread and storage areas.

In *Llibre d'Evast i Blanquerna* Llull describes Evast and Aloma's private chapel, but except for this prayer room, did devotional spaces actually exist in medieval homes? Apart from the private chapels of kings and the members of their families and those found in castles and towers, explicit

<sup>13</sup> It is worth noting the studies conducted by (Batlle Gallart 1983, 1985, 1993, 1998; Batlle Gallart and Vinyoles 2002, pp. 107–36; Vinyoles 1976, 2015; Bolós and Sánchez-Boira 2014, 2015). See also: (Broida 1986–1987; Ortí i Gost 1994; Bolós 2000, 2002; Fité 2001; Vercher Lletí 2005; Benito i Monclús 2008). Regarding medieval houses in the Iberian Peninsula, see: (Díez Jorge and Palazón 2015).

<sup>14</sup> Bolós points out that some houses in Lleida had up to four floors ranging from a subterranean floor including a cellar, to two more floors above ground, an attic and terraces (Bolós and Sánchez-Boira 2015, p. 19). Furthermore, many houses had courtyards or vegetable gardens.



references to “private chapels” in households are scarce in the documents analysed (Broida 1986–1987, pp. 262–64). It is known that individuals with a high professional and socio-economic status, such as Arnau de Vilanova, Pere Beçet and Pere de Queralt,<sup>15</sup> had chapels. Iglesias talks about Joan Busot’s chapel because it contained objects like retables and prayer books that were used in chapels (Iglesias 1996, pp. 110–11). However, among the well-off classes and the craftsmen, it was more common for devotional practices to be developed in the most important rooms of the house. Retables, oratories and images were found in bedrooms, study rooms or other shared spaces. The so-called *prayer corner* in medieval homes, the successor of the homes of early Christians, was a multi-functional space that combined private, personal, family and work uses, which was characteristic of the homes in the Late Middle Ages.<sup>16</sup>

## 6. Religious Objects in Late Medieval Catalan Households

This section is devoted to the analysis of the devotional objects founded in Catalan houses. In the eighty-five inventories analysed, two hundred and thirty-five devotional objects were listed. The religious books constituting the incipient libraries of medieval laypeople were not included because they deserve to be examined in a monographic study.<sup>17</sup>

Among those two hundred and thirty-five objects, there were fifty-two retables, fifty painted cloths, forty-seven oratories, twenty-four images, sixteen paternosters, six reliquaries, five panels, four Agni Dei, four curtains, three boards, two pieces of bright silk fabric, two cases, two chalices, two altars, two pavises and one music stand. Of all these possessions, none were from the thirteenth century.<sup>18</sup> Thirty-four objects were from the fourteenth century and the rest were from the fifteenth century. As we are going to see, this shows that the presence of devotional objects increased considerably in the fifteenth century as a result of the enrichment of the Catalan bourgeoisie and of higher levels of wellbeing. The middle classes with higher purchasing power wanted to emulate the social and religious forms and habits of the highest estates of society (Yarza 1992, p. 29; Español 1992a, pp. 224–25; Molina 1999, pp. 43–55). This phenomenon was also observed in the large European cities of that time. The cases of Tuscany and Venice at the beginning of the Renaissance have been studied in depth.<sup>19</sup>

It is not easy to classify the number and diversity of objects found in post-mortem inventories since the function of the element listed is often unknown. They are described below, starting by those objects containing religious images that may have been the visual aid for prayer of believers such as retables, oratories, images and painted cloths. Then, other kinds of devotional objects like Agni Dei, reliquaries and paternosters will be discussed.

<sup>15</sup> Regarding the renowned physician and theologian Arnau de Vilanova († 1311), see (Chabás 1903, pp. 189–203; Regarding Pere Beçet, see (Martorell and Valls i Taverner 1911–1912, pp. 577–656); Regarding Pere de Queralt, see (Costa 1983, pp. 115–45).

<sup>16</sup> The existence of these spaces for devotion in homes has been acknowledged since early Christianity (Kitzinger 1954, pp. 98–99; Ringbom 1997, pp. 11–13; Webb 2005, p. 27; Herrin 2005, pp. 82–87; Kolpacoff Deane 2013, pp. 67–71; Smith 2014, p. 31; Bacci 2018, pp. 272–76). Anglo-Saxon historiography talks about the “icon corner or prayer corner” to allude to the spaces of the Byzantine houses where the laity placed icons, support for their personal and family devotion (Herrin 2005, pp. 71–90; Bacci 2018, pp. 72–276). Those icons, which were considered prestigious because of their oriental origin, became frequent in Italian homes from the thirteenth century up to the Early Modern Period (Voulgaropoulou 2019). More recently, Smith has drawn attention to the role played by relics as devotional objects in the framework of domestic life in Western Europe in the early centuries of Christianity (Smith 2014, pp. 23–46; Blick 2019).

<sup>17</sup> Regarding Catalan libraries, see: (Madurell i Marimon 1974; Batlle Gallart 1981b; Hernando 1994, 1995; Iglesias 1996; Alcoy 2005). For Majorcan libraries: (Hillgarth 1991).

<sup>18</sup> The only devotional object is a prayer book that belonged to Bernat Durfort and was inventoried in 1290 (Batlle Gallart 1988, p. 42).

<sup>19</sup> See especially (Goldthwaite 1993). Regarding the number of objects present in Italian houses, see: (Morse 2007; Schmidt 2001, 2005; Campbell et al. 2013; Corry et al. 2017, 2019). For Italian houses, see as well: Ajmar-Wollheim and Dennis 2006; Brundin et al. 2018).

## 6.1. Devotional or Decorative Objects That Include Religious Iconography

### 6.1.1. Retables and Oratories

These types of objects constituted the bulk of the religious belongings of laypeople in the Late Middle Ages. The figures speak for themselves: fifty-two retables and forty-seven oratories. They are, together with painted cloths, the objects that appear the most in the inventories analysed. Families often owned more than one.

The study of these pieces of religious furniture raises the difficulty of defining them. It is not easy to determine the difference between retables and oratories as both terms describe objects of a very similar kind, size and iconography.

The retable, as the etymology of the word indicates, *retro-tabula*, has been defined as a “structure located behind or on the altar containing figurative or history-related decoration” (Le Pogam and Vivet-Peçlet 2009, p. 18), hence fulfilling a liturgical function. Historiography has pointed out the existence of a large number of small-sized retables that came in various shapes and mainly performed a devotional function in the domestic environment, without dismissing their use as complements to portable altars.<sup>20</sup> Retables that include sculptures or paintings are currently often referred to as altarpieces. They became common from the end of the thirteenth century onwards. They were made of wood, stone, gold, silver or ivory.

It is harder to define the term oratory, which frequently appears in the abovementioned documents. The Catalan–Valencian–Balearic dictionary provides a definition that seems to match the object recorded in the inventories: “Diptych, triptych, painting of sacred images, etc., which served as a small portable retable before which prayers were said.”<sup>21</sup> The term *oratory* comes from the Latin verb *orare*, which means to pray. Although an oratory currently refers to a private or semi-private place of worship, in the Middle Ages it was a structure similar to a retable used in houses.

Based on the information gathered in the inventories, what exactly is the difference between a retable and an oratory? The first thing that is apparent is the ambiguity of the terms used by the notaries themselves: *A retable or oratory made of wood including a painting of the Virgin Mary with her son in her arms and a crucifix and other devotions on one door, on another door the Pietà and on the third one a painting of Saint Michael and saint Raphael* (Soler i Palet 1916a, p. 303). Or, when listing the belongings of Martin the Humane: *Oratory, alias retable, made of wood of Greek origin, including four foldable parts containing four stories* (Gudiol i Cunill 1902, p. 449). According to Jaume Sastre, who has studied the case of Majorcan households, oratories were foldable objects equipped with doors, which contained an image, while retables were flat open structures where the image was depicted on the front part (Sastre Moll 2003, p. 51). However, this distinction does not match the complex reality reflected in the Catalan inventories. The retables of Antoni Mura and Pere Girós, for instance, have two doors: *A small golden retable made of wood with two doors, one with an image of the Pietà and the other one Our Lady and other saints* (Soler i Palet 1916a, pp. 295–96) and *a small three-door retable in its case* (Roca 1927–1928a, p. 314). The reference of a retable shaped like a cabinet has also been preserved: *A retable that has the shape of a cabinet showing the image of Our Lady, very subtle* (Cifuentes i Comamala 2000). It is indeed true that, of the oratories that appear in the inventories, eight of them had doors that closed the piece and another three had the structure of a cabinet.

Another element that enables distinguishing retables from oratories is the size. Regrettably, the inventories hardly provide any information about the size of the recorded objects. Both large retables, *a large retable on which Christopher is painted* (García Panardes 1983, p. 175), and small ones are described. Small retables appear much more often than large ones. They are mentioned nine times. This being

<sup>20</sup> Regarding the devotional function of small-sized retables, see: (Van Os 1994; Wilkins 2002; Schmidt 2001, 2005; Le Pogam and Vivet-Peçlet 2009).

<sup>21</sup> (Alcover and de B. Moll).

said, what is understood by a small retable? In Pere Girgós' house, there was a small retable hanging on a wall,<sup>22</sup> while, around the same period, a portable retable was listed: *a small retable depicting the image of saint Mary and other images of saints, in its wooden case* (Casas Homs 1970, p. 28).

Oratories exist in different sizes and formats. Although they are described as large, small ones also existed and there is even mention of *half an oratory*. In a house from the mid-fourteenth century, two oratories were found: *A large oratory and a small one with images of my Lord God and of Saint Mary as well as other saints* (López Pizcueta 1992, p. 53). A tanner who lived at the end of the fifteenth century had an oratory at home: *a small oratory showing an image of Jesus crucified, Mary and John including a moulding and wooden frame* (Soler i Palet 1916a, p. 299). This oratory contained a moulding, which was typical of oratories back then. They were occasionally placed on a base: *A wooden oratory that can be closed, placed on a golden stand showing the figure of a crucifix* (Soler i Palet 1916a, p. 301).

Based on the documentation consulted, it can thus be concluded that both the terms retable and oratory are used indistinctly for the same type of devotional object. They were usually small and often foldable. However, oratories, more so than retables, were articulated objects which often had doors that closed.

For a study of religious expressions present in domestic devotion, analysing the location of these objects is key. The inventories usually specify the place where the possessions of the deceased were located. They mostly appeared in the rooms where family life took place such as the bedroom of the deceased, the dining room or the study room. Occasionally, they were found in the back rooms or rooms near the entrance of the house, in the staircase or in the spaces where work was performed. A good example is the bedroom of the Barcelona merchant Guillem Ferrer where he had *a small retable with two panels, on which the Crucifix of Jesus Christ and the image of saint Mary are painted, kept in a painted wooden case that hangs on the wall* (Casas Homs 1970, p. 29). Another citizen from Barcelona, Ferrer Gualbes, had a similar object at the foot of his bed: *Another retable containing a painted cloth, at the foot of the bed, depicting the Virgin Mary and her son in a tabernacle and two apostles, Peter on the left side and Paul on the right* (García Panardes 1983, p. 183). In both cases, the retables, located in the bedroom and near the bed, portray images that Guillem Ferrer and Ferrer Gualbes would contemplate devoutly every day when saying their prayers in the morning and in the evening, in accordance with what preachers recommended at that time. The representation of the Virgin Mary is significant, and, in Guillem Ferrer's retable, the crucifix is also portrayed. Those images are the ones that appear the most in the post-mortem inventories as will be explained below.

These retables or oratories hung on the wall or on a bar that supported them as evidenced in this inventory of the Torreferrada in the municipality of Santa Eulàlia de Riuprimer: *A retable including a painted cloth of Saint Christopher nailed onto bars*. The documents specify that they were often covered with curtains and drapes, following the medieval habit of concealing images during certain liturgical periods such as Lent or when celebrating mass in order to concentrate thoughts on the action of the priest consecrating the Eucharist (Gudiol i Cunill 1902, pp. 449–90). The inventory of sailor García Roig describes *an antique retable of the Virgin Mary surrounded by a cloth* (Soler i Palet 1916a, p. 294) and also *a wooden oratory of medium-sized doors, showing paintings of the crucifix of Jesus Christ and the Image of the Virgin Mary and of Saint Catherine, as well as some other images, hanging on the wall (...)* and *a hessian towel, with blue strips at the top of the aforementioned...oratory. Already used* (Roca 1923, p. 150). The act of "revealing and concealing" also played an important role in the domestic environment as it contributed to reinforcing the desire to contemplate the image, the visual support of prayer.<sup>23</sup> These spaces of prayer, multifunctional spaces given the limited size of urban houses, were also sacralised thanks to

<sup>22</sup> First, *a small retable of two panels on which the Crucifix of Jesus Christ is painted and the image of Saint Mary, in its painted wooden case, which hangs on the wall* (Roca 1927–1928b, p. 385).

<sup>23</sup> Curtains depicting religious figures were inventoried on four occasions: *Curtains of black fabric on which the lamb of Saint John is painted. There are six pieces*. (Soler i Palet 1916a, p. 291). Regarding the senses in the Middle Ages, see: (Nichols et al. 2008; Palazzo 2014, 2016; Jørgensen et al. 2015).

the light, the glass lamps burning in front of them: *A retable with a painted image of the glorious Virgin Mary and a glass lamp* (Soler i Palet 1916a, p. 293).

Retables, oratories and images also had an apotropaic function. This must have been the case of the numerous images, oratories and retables of Saint Christopher located in staircases or near the front door of the house: *An old one of Saint Christopher at the top of the stairs* (Soler i Palet 1916a, p. 294) and *one of Saint Christopher carrying Jesus on his shoulders at the top of the stairs* (Idem., pp. 304–5), as will later be described in the iconography.

Many of the retables and oratories recorded in the inventories are objects that were carefully stored inside all kinds of boxes, benches with drawers and trunks in the different rooms of the houses. The devotees had to take them out at certain times of the day, or at specific times of the liturgical calendar, especially during feast days or periods such as Advent, Christmas, Lent and Easter. They were kept in cases that preserved them from dust, dirt or breakage. Given the small size and the portable nature of these objects, it is necessary to consider the possibility that their owners carried them with them when they travelled for professional or devotional reasons. Perhaps this was the case of Guillem Ferrer, the merchant mentioned earlier, who owned *a small retable containing the image of Saint Mary, and other images of saints, in a wooden case* (Roca 1927–1928b, p. 385) or that of Antoni Mura, owner of an ivory oratory: *a small ivory oratory containing images stored in a wooden case* (Soler i Palet 1916a, pp. 295–96).

As for the materials, wood was the most common support for retables and oratories. Some of them were made entirely out of wood, others only had a wooden structure onto which the painted cloth or paper was stuck or inserted in, and a moulded frame: *An oratory with a painted cloth showing the image of Our Lady, Saint Peter and Saint Catherine within its moulded frame* (Soler i Palet 1916a, p. 299). Oratories featured a greater variety of materials and were made of marble, plaster, ivory, fabric or paper: *A marble oratory shaped like a cabinet depicting Jesus crucified and in another part Our Lady with Jesus in her arms* (Soler i Palet 1916a, pp. 303–4); *A small plaster oratory portraying the Annunciation; An ivory oratory with doors and inside an image of Our Lady with Jesus in her arms and two images on each door* (Soler i Palet 1916a, pp. 303–4); *A paper oratory with a wooden ornament* (Soler i Palet 1916a, p. 302).

With regard to the technique, they were mostly painted directly on prepared wood, on fabric or on cloth. Painted cloths frequently appear in the documents analysed: of the fifty-two retables inventoried, ten are painted on wood, eight are painted cloths. In the case of oratories, six are painted on wood and five are painted cloths of a total of forty-seven oratories. The technique used in the rest of the objects is not known. The notaries do not specify the technique although retables and oratories in the shape of a cabinet may presuppose the existence of sculptural images: *A retable shaped like a cabinet showing the image of Our Lady, very subtle* (Cifuentes i Comamala 2000, p. 470).

### 6.1.2. Images

In addition to retables and oratories, the inventories itemised twenty-four images: eleven of the Virgin, place the Veronica of Our Lady, six of crucifixes, four of saints, two of the Infant Jesus. It is worth noting that the term image simply refers to the representation of a religious figure and can therefore refer to both two-dimensional objects (painted on wood or cloth or in relief) and three-dimensional objects. Only the material, the reference to clothing or jewels, or the fact that the image is stored in a box or case, enables us to deduce that it is a free-standing sculpture.

The majority of the images listed corresponds to the Mother of God, eleven in total. Two were silver, two were terracotta, two were made of paper and one was made of wood. The material of the rest of the images is unknown. One of them was of the Mother of God wearing a mantle: *An image of Our Lady wearing a red silk cloak and one of Jesus* (Soler i Palet 1916a, p. 297). Joan Berenguer de Junyent owned a piece that was carefully stored in a valuable receptacle: *A very small silver box containing a wooden image of Our Lady and two pearls* (Soler i Palet 1916b, p. 592). The materials used, silver, terra cotta, tin and paper, indicate that they were small figures, ideal for private devotion. Actually, the predecessors of these images were the small silver or ivory statuettes that circulated throughout

Europe in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The two tin moulds that belonged to Narcisa, the wife of a hat maker, exemplifies how popular religious imagery was. The moulds were used in the standardised manufacturing of serialised images: *Two medium-sized images or tin moulds, one of Our Lady and the other one of Jesus* (Soler i Palet 1916b, p. 392).

On two occasions, the inventories specify the name of the image of the Virgin: *An image of the Virgin Mary who is from El Puix* (Soler i Palet 1916a, p. 291). *Two gold-plated silver Virgins of Montserrat* (Soler i Palet 1916b, p. 592), which shows the predilection for these two Marian sanctuaries, El Puig (Valencia) and Montserrat, the focus of numerous local pilgrimages during the Late Middle Ages. The Holy face of *Our Lady* that Joan Berenguer de Junyent owned was considered very old and was also of a Marian nature (see Figure 2 for an example of a Veronica of Our Lady). It is an iconography that spread widely throughout Catalonia, Valencia and Majorca and that at times assumed Immaculate Conception symbolism (Crispí 1996a, 1996b; Sureda i Jubany 2017).



**Figure 2.** Veronica of Our Lady. Museu Episcopal de Vic

The inventories include six crucifixes, five of which are free-standing images. Two crucifixes are silver, one is ivory, one has a plaster figure of Christ on a wooden cross, one is not specified and the last one is painted on linen. Of all the images that appear in the inventories, there are four that are dedicated to two popular saints, a plaster figure of Saint Catherine that belonged to a tailor called Mateu Maldà and three of Saint Christopher.

### 6.1.3. The Child Jesus

Among the objects inventoried at the house of Pere Girgós in 1389, there was a small Infant Jesus painted the way Saint Christopher used to carry him, with a golden orb in his left hand, wearing a

brocade dress in the front part and at the back, a golden braid with golden leaves (Roca 1927–1928a, p. 388). A century later, Coloma, the widow of a fuller from Barcelona, owned a wooden box or small case to put a figurine of Jesus inside in which there was a wooden Jesus wearing a tawny surcoat with a gold lace trim and a tin ‘gecerant’<sup>24</sup> (Soler i Palet 1916a, p. 302). In the same period, Joan Berenguer de Junyent, had a crib made of silver poplar wood painted green on the outside featuring the name Jesus (Soler i Palet 1916a, p. 303) and we have two references in Majorca, where notary Martí de Cedrelles had a small figure of baby Jesus (1483) in the bedroom and monsignor Deia had a small plaster figure of Infant Jesus and a shirt of Baby Jesus (1501) (Llompart 1980, p. 366). Those valuable observations prove the existence of statuettes of the Christ Child in the late fourteenth century and their number increased in the fifteenth century. It is clear from the inventories that the figures refer to free-standing wooden or plaster sculptures of the Child Jesus, often dressed. They were small-sized devotional statuettes that laypeople caressed and kissed, encouraged by the gentle and affective piety characteristic of the *Devotio Moderna*.

The manufacturing of these Infant Jesus figurines is related to the creation nativity scenes, inspired by the initiative of Saint Francis of Assisi to stage the birth of Jesus in Grecco on 25 December, 1223.<sup>25</sup> The first documented nativity scene is the one Pope Nicolau III (1288–1292) commissioned for the Basilica of Saint Mary Major in Rome (Sarnecka 2019, p. 164). It is also known that Queen Sancha of Naples, the daughter of the kings of Majorca, donated a figure of a kneeling Virgin with baby Jesus to the nuns of the order of Saint Clare in Naples in 1340 (Sarnecka 2019, p. 164). It is probably no coincidence that an early sculptural ensemble from the second half of the fourteenth century of the Birth of Jesus is preserved in the monastery of the Poor Clares of Saint Mary in Pedralbes, Barcelona (Figure 3). It represents the Virgin and Saint Joseph kneeling in adoration to the Child Jesus, lying on the ground, in accordance with the description of the *Meditations Vitae Christi* and the Nativity of Jesus (Español 1992b, pp. 301–3; Terés 2005, pp. 65–67). Manger scenes became popular in the fifteenth century and by the first half of the sixteenth century many Italian churches had their own sculptural representations of the Nativity (Sarnecka 2019, p. 166).

In parallel to the development of nativity scenes, the first free-standing statuettes of baby Jesus appeared. It is worth noting that those figurines were used for liturgical purposes during the Christmas season. They were placed on a manger near the altar or directly on the communion table and were venerated by those attending mass (Frugoni 2012, p. 16; Siddi 2012, p. 41). The oldest Infant Jesus figures were found in the central area of Italy and seemed to follow the same prototype, possibly a sculpture by Nicola Pisano from the late thirteenth century.<sup>26</sup> Their initial liturgical function cannot be detached from their devotional use in convents as both monks and nuns were allowed have them in their cells to encourage personal piety, following the advice of their mystical contemporaries (Sarnecka 2019, p. 169). It is not until the end of the fifteenth century that, at least in Italy, this shift to private homes is observed. Figurines of the Child Jesus as well as cribs were first documented at that time. The Child Jesus had to be put in the crib from Christmas Eve to the celebration of Candlemas, after which it had to be kept in a box or case as mentioned in the possessions of Coloma (Sarnecka 2019, p. 170). Eight wooden cribs decorated with delicate tracery dating back to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries have been preserved. Some of them had bells that tinkled when the crib was rocked or touched (Ippel 2014, pp. 330–47; Brilliant 2017, pp. 175–76).

Joan Berenguer de Junyent’s crib had the name Jesus in coloured letters written on it. It is not known if it was the whole name or the monogram JHS. This devotion to the name Jesus was encouraged by Bernardino of Siena and left a mark on the laity in the Late Middle Ages, as was corroborated by the

<sup>24</sup> The current Catalan meaning of this word has not been found, so it could not be translated into English.

<sup>25</sup> Regarding the origins and spreading of nativity scenes, see, amongst others: (Frugoni and Siddi 2012; Sarnecka 2019). See as well: (Van Os 1994, pp. 98–104).

<sup>26</sup> (Siddi 2012, pp. 33–41). It features the previous biography about the origins and development of the Italian figures of the Infant Jesus of the Trecento and early Quattrocento.

two hundred or three hundred names in terracotta of Flanders that glove maker Joan Llop had in his shop (Duran i Sanpere 1972–1975, vol. 2, pp. 298–300). This same individual, a German man who had settled in Barcelona, also traded with figurines of the Child. The inventory compiled after his death documented three hundred terracotta figurines, which shows the extent of the devotion to images of Jesus. Joan Llop's business, which also included retables, painted cloths and paper and parchment images, prospered because of the growing demand for devotional imagery of the laity and the clergy.<sup>27</sup>



**Figure 3.** Nativity Scene. Reial Monestir de Santa Maria de Pedralbes. MMP 148.207. Foto Jordi Puig.

#### 6.1.4. Painted Cloths

Among the objects listed in the post-mortem inventories containing religious or profane images, no less than fifty painted cloths appeared. As Gudiol pointed out, these are objects in which paint has been applied directly onto cloth, serge or hemp. Painted cloths were very popular among the middle classes because they served as inexpensive imitations of the famous tapestries from the Netherlands that began to be documented in Catalonia in the mid-fourteenth century. In Catalonia, tapestries were called *draps de ras* ('ras' is the simplified term for Arras, one of the major tapestry-making centres and the capital of Artois).<sup>28</sup>

Painted cloths were nailed or glued onto a wooden framework that supported them and they were hung on walls. They mainly had an ornamental function, decorating dining rooms, rooms, study rooms and other rooms in the houses of wealthy families in the fifteenth century. The size of the painted cloths,

<sup>27</sup> His inventory also includes ten retables depicting paintings of the Virgin, three of Saint Barbara, two showing stories of the Mother of God, five large retables of the Virgin Mary with her son in her arms and eighty-six painted cloths that measured 1.25 palms the iconography of which was not specified. Two hundred unidentified sculptures, forty sheets of paper containing the name of Jesus were also mentioned (Duran i Sanpere 1972–1975, vol. 2, pp. 298–300).

<sup>28</sup> (Gudiol i Cunill 1902, pp. 399, 495–96). Recently, painted cloths have been referred to: (Terés 1998, pp. 299–317; Molina 1999, pp. 41–43; García Marsilla 2001, pp. 187–89; Sastre Moll 2003, pp. 54–56).

which ranged from one to two and a half *canes*, the equivalent of 2.3 to 3.8 metres,<sup>29</sup> leaves no doubt about their decorative use. Works of art such as a *painted cloth depicting the story of Job measures around two and a half canes* (Soler i Palet 1916a, p. 303) or a *painted cloth portraying the Annunciation to the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Adoration of the Magi*, located at the head of the room (Broida 1986–1987, pp. 253–54) must have occupied a large part of the wall of the most important rooms in late medieval homes.

The decorative nature of painted cloths explains the profane iconography of those objects representing mainly mythological, historical and literary themes. This fact contrasts with the numerous retables commissioned to coetaneous painters and sculptors.<sup>30</sup> The fifty-two painted cloths recorded in the inventories analysed contained religious motifs showing Christological, Marian and hagiographic iconography. Not all were conceived to hang on walls. As mentioned earlier, many of them were represented on the central part of retables and oratories and had a moulded or simple frame: *An ornament of blue wood surrounded by white stars containing a painted cloth portraying images of Saint Michael and Saint Anthony* (Soler i Palet 1916a, pp. 295–96). Other times, the references refer to small-sized structures such as a *very small painted cloth in the oratory featuring Our Lady and Jesus Christ on her lap* (Soler i Palet 1916a, p. 301). This last one was a small painting of the Pietà, perhaps placed on a piece of furniture in the study or in the bedroom. It could have been the visual aid for prayer of the owner seeking to experience the pain of Mary facing the death of her Son.

#### 6.1.5. Iconography of Devotional Objects

Retables, oratories, boards, images and even painted cloths inventoried in late medieval households reflect the devotional universe professed by laypeople at that time. Theoretically, they should be analogous to the wide range of Christological, Marian and hagiographic images specified in the commissions of retables for cathedrals, parishes and monasteries or conventual churches. However, the analysis of the inventories points in another direction: forty-three representations of the Virgin were identified (referred to as Madonna, Our Lady, Saint Mary, Virgin Mary, etc.) and twelve of the Mother of God (Mary with the Infant in her arms). A total of fifty-five images of the Virgin, alone, with the Infant Jesus in her arms, or surrounded by angels and saints were registered. Marian iconography is thus by far the most common, followed at a distance by the crucifixion, cited twenty-one times, and at a much greater distance, by saints and angels, as we shall see later. The first conclusion drawn is that laypeople had a clear preference for the Virgin Mary, a fact that has also been observed in Valencian and Majorcan homes (García Marsilla 2001, p. 171; Sastre Moll 2003, pp. 52–56) and that must be understood within the framework of the belief in Mary's exceptional power of intercession because of her divine motherhood. The preaching of priests, extensive Marian literature, as well as compilations of miracles, contributed to highlighting her spiritual maternity and, as a consequence, her mediating role.<sup>31</sup>

Despite the ambiguity of the notaries' descriptions, Marian images must have been representations of the Virgin and Jesus in her arms. It was the most widespread image in the Late Middle Ages, as seen in the hundreds of Romanesque and Gothic sculptures of the Mother of God preserved in Catalonia and the numerous trecentist retables in which she is the central figure. With respect to Marian scenes, the ones that appear the most are the Annunciation, cited as the Greeting, and the Pietà. They are featured nine and eight times respectively. Both themes stress Mary's maternal role. In the Annunciation, by giving her consent, the Virgin becomes the Mother of Jesus. On Mount Calvary, Mary, afflicted by pain, holding the lifeless body of her son on her lap, shows maternal suffering. It is associated with redemptive passion. Several painted cloths illustrate longer parts of Mary's

<sup>29</sup> The Barcelona *cana*, a measurement used to measure numerous inventoried painted cloths, corresponds to 1.55 m. Another measurement used is the *palm*, which is the equivalent of 20.8 cm.

<sup>30</sup> Regarding the profane iconography of tapestries and painted cloths, see (Terés 1998).

<sup>31</sup> For devotion to the Virgin in Catalonia, see: (Crispí 2001, pp. 39–150).



life: two depict the well-known joys of the Virgin,<sup>32</sup> iconography held in high esteem in Catalonia,<sup>33</sup> and another one portrays the story of the Virgin.<sup>34</sup> The conception, childhood and transformation of the Virgin Mary (stories related to Anna and Joachim and Mary's presentation in the Temple), narrated in apocryphal writings, also had a great impact on the laity, as evidenced by the following two splendid objects: *A painted cloth portraying kings of the lineage of the Virgin Mary. On one side there are the fifteen steps Virgin Mary climbs and on the other one Joachim and Saint Anne. It is approximately three canes long and contains a cloth of black fabric and some painted branches* (Soler i Palet 1916a, p. 301). *Another painted cloth shows a painting of the Death of Our Lady with a yellow jug and branches on said painted cloth* (Soler i Palet 1916a, p. 297).

The second most common representations after Marian images belonged to Christological iconography. Twenty-one crucifixes were listed. Six were free-standing figurines and the rest were either paintings or sculptures of crucifixes depicted in one of the panels of the retables, either on their own or flanked by the Virgin and Saint John or even the three Marys. The retables and oratories are often diptychs that combine the Crucifixion with the representation of the Mother of God: *A marble oratory in the shape of a cabinet where Jesus appears crucified and on the other part Our Lady holding Jesus in her arms.* (Soler i Palet 1916a, pp. 303–4).

The Christological scenes represented correspond mainly to childhood, especially Nativity scenes, which appear eight times, Epiphany, mentioned five times, and the Passion of Christ, which is listed five times. Images related to the passion and death of Jesus such as the Descent from the Cross, the Burial, the Veronica of Christ or the *Passio Imaginis* were also alluded to. Unfortunately, it is hard to know which image the notary referred to when describing a representation of Jesus that appears several times in the legal documentation: *a built-in oratory, which is painted green on the outside and red on the inside, portraying the image of Jesus Christ and the Nativity of Jesus Christ* (García Panardes 1983, pp. 172–73).

A large number of angels and saints is mentioned: Saint Christopher appears twelve times, Saint Michael and Saint Anthony five times, Saint Francis, Saint Cosmas and Damian, Mary Magdalene, Saint Catherine, Saint Barbara and Saint Eulalia three times, Saint Jerome and Saint Sebastian twice. Other saints like Peter, Helena, Anne, John the Baptist, John, Paul, Gregory, Onuphrius, Benet and Bernard were mentioned once. In some cases, the saint was represented on his/her own, but other images were narrative, depicting the events of their lives, as is the case of those dedicated to Saint Mary Magdalene and Saint Barbara, two saints that were widely venerated in the Late Middle Ages.

The most striking feature is the repeated reference to images of Saint Christopher. There are twelve images of him, more than of any other saint. Saint Christopher, a Canaanite, is considered the protector of travellers and pilgrims. The devotion to Saint Christopher became widespread in the thirteenth century in the wake of the legend that narrates how he performed service to Christ by helping a child cross a river and the child turns out to be Jesus (Rigaux 1996; García Cuadrado 2000; Buxton 2006; Manzarbeitia Valle 2009; Ondoño Rendón 2015; Thomson 2018). Curiously enough, the inventories specify twice that the images were placed at the top of the stairs, which reinforces the apotropaic function of the representation of Saint Christopher. Laypeople counted on his protection when they travelled or went on a pilgrimage.<sup>35</sup>

The painted cloths, because of their decorative nature, often depicted less conventional images. Objects dedicated to characters from the Old Testament such as Job,<sup>36</sup> the queen of Sheba<sup>37</sup> and

<sup>32</sup> *A very old painted cloth depicting the seven joys of the Virgin Mary* (Soler i Palet 1916a, p. 302).

<sup>33</sup> An extensive bibliography on the spreading of the joys of Mary in Catalonia, both with regard to religious texts and iconography. See two recent studies: (de Courcelles 1992; Vicens 2003, pp. 25–50).

<sup>34</sup> *Painted cloth portraying the story of the Virgin* (Soler i Palet 1916a, p. 297).

<sup>35</sup> Rigaux has stressed the representation of the saint on the exterior façades of churches in the north of Italy and the south of Germany with regard to the saint's protection to travellers and pilgrims (Rigaux 1996, pp. 246–48).

<sup>36</sup> *A painted cloth depicting the story of Job, which measures approximately two canes and a half* (Soler i Palet 1916a, p. 303).

<sup>37</sup> *A retable portraying the Queen of Sheba* (Soler i Palet 1916a, pp. 304–5).

Solomon,<sup>38</sup> were inventoried. Other illustrations that were more symbolic such as the representation of the Old and the New Testament were also listed.<sup>39</sup> Some painted cloths, of a clear moral content, included representations of the seven capital sins, like the painted cloth owned by Francesc Rigau: *A folded painted cloth that was in the dining room portrays the story of the seven mortal sins* (Soler i Palet 1916a, pp. 304–5) or the large cloth dedicated to the Antichrist, which belonged to Coloma.<sup>40</sup> The case of two retables that illustrated various invocations is also worth mentioning: *First, a retable containing a painted cloth on which numerous different invocations are painted* (García Panardes 1983, p. 191) and some panel paintings that represented the Ten Commandments.<sup>41</sup> Another theme that was not very common was the destruction of Jerusalem. Its image was found in the house of a Barcelona blacksmith. It illustrated an apocryphal text of the Passion and Resurrection of Christ of which versions from the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries exist in Catalonia.<sup>42</sup>

## 6.2. Objects with a Devotional Function

### 6.2.1. Paternosters

Among the possessions of merchant Guillem Ferrer, there was: a strip with white silk paternosters, and with blue glass paternosters (Casas Homs 1970, p. 30) and also a thick pearl necklace and seven loops of said pearls, as well as seven silver green enamel paternosters, which I, Isabel (woman) affirm to be mine (hers). A few years later, in 1408, when the belongings of sculptor Pere Sanglada were inventoried, three paternosters are described: three rosaries or paternosters: one made of jet containing five amber roses, another on made of jet containing wedges of gold-plated silver, and the third one made of coral with four silver pieces to connect (unions) and additionally, a pendant with a small cross and four small pearls, that is to say, the jewels of Saurina (Batlle Gallart 1993, p. 92). Paternosters were some of the devotional objects that appeared the most in the inventories of laypeople and clergymen in the Late Middle Ages. They were strings of beads used to pray the Lord's Prayer, as many times as the number of beads the object contained (Figure 4).<sup>43</sup>

Repeated recitation of the the Lord's Prayer and the Hail Mary spread in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries as a pious practice. In the case of the Ave Maria, the numerous miracles attributed to the Virgin Mary by devotees who recited this prayer contributed to its success. Later, in the fifteenth century, praying the Ave Maria in sets of tens of times led to the creation of a new prayer: the rosary, which combined repeating the Ave Maria one hundred and fifty times while contemplating episodes of the life of Jesus Christ.<sup>44</sup> At the same time, repeating the Lord's Prayer also turned into devotional practice among the laity as attested by the lay brothers of the Carthusian and Cistercian orders who prayed the Lord's Prayer in substitution of the Divine Office in the thirteenth century.<sup>45</sup>

In order to count the number of vocal prayers, a simple cord containing knots was used, an element that was also present in other religions such as Buddhism and Islam. In Christianity, there are several references to these old cords, but one of the most renowned ones is that of the noblewoman Lady Godiva of Coventry, who, in the eleventh century, bequeathed the paternoster beads she used for

<sup>38</sup> *A small painted cloth showing the story of Solomon* (Soler i Palet 1916a, p. 298).

<sup>39</sup> *An old smoke grey painted cloth of the Old and New Testament* (Soler i Palet 1916a, p. 298)

<sup>40</sup> *A large painted cloth showing the Antichrist* (Soler i Palet 1916a, p. 301)

<sup>41</sup> *Another panel painting of the Commandments* (Costa 1983, p. 126).

<sup>42</sup> Another painted cloth regarding this theme was inventoried at the home of Arnau Guillem Samuntada, beneficiary of Santa Maria del Mar (1493): *Another painted cloth of approximately two and a half canes on which the destruction of Jerusalem is painted* (Soler i Palet 1916a, p. 299). Regarding the manuscripts that include the destruction of Jerusalem, see: (Hernando 1989, pp. 1–116).

<sup>43</sup> The only two studies on paternosters in Catalonia are: (Gudiol i Cunill 1923a, 1923b; Serra i Boldú 1925). See references to said objects in: (Winston-Allen 1998, pp. 111–16; Falkenburg 2017, pp. 106–10).

<sup>44</sup> Regarding the origin and spreading of the rosary, see the recent work by (Winston-Allen 1998).

<sup>45</sup> (Winston-Allen 1998, pp. 14–15) (citing Thurston 1 . . . ). Actually, the origin of the rosary lies in the replacement of the text of the psalm for the Ave Maria as well as the addendum of the contemplation of episodes of the life of Christ.

praying to the religious community she had founded (Winston-Allen 1998, p. 14). The cord soon turned into a string of beads, of different materials and sizes, referred to as a paternoster, zapel, chaplet, etc. The creation of a specialised manufacture documented in London and Paris at the end of the thirteenth century<sup>46</sup> shows how successful its use was as a devotional object. Documents have also been preserved in Catalonia. Gudiol, who carried out one of the first studies on rosaries in Catalonia, documents a paternoster at the castle of Lluçà in 1321. They are often cited in post-mortem inventories of laypeople and clergy during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.



**Figure 4.** Altarpiece of Saint Maria Magdalena de Perella. Museu Episcopal de Vic.

Apart from the evidence found in documents, Catalan Gothic paintings and sculptures also include a large number of paternosters on coffins and tombstones where they appear in the hands of the deceased as a testimony to their piety.<sup>47</sup> Examples are the tombstone of Nagalbos in the cathedral of Tortosa and the coffin of Saint Mary of Cervelló in the Basilica of Our Lady of Mercy in Barcelona, both dating from the fourteenth century (Serra i Boldú 1925, pp. 8 bis, 16 bis). Several fifteenth century altarpieces dedicated to Mary Magdalene depict the saint passing the paternoster. The altarpiece of Saint Magdalene of Conangle, for instance, shows the saint wearing a paternoster

<sup>46</sup> (Winston-Allen 1998, p. 12) Étienne Boileau: *Livre des métiers* mentions the artisans that manufactured paternosters in accordance with the materials they worked with.

<sup>47</sup> Serra i Boldú publishes the first ones (Serra i Boldú 1925, pp. 8 bis, 16 bis).

containing sixteen beads and a cross.<sup>48</sup> The panel painting of Mary Magdalene was probably part of the altarpiece depicting Saint Anne, Saint Bartholomew and Saint Mary Magdalene in Sant Martí de Pertegas (Sant Celoni, Barcelona) where the saint passes a paternoster of twenty-nine crystal or amber beads (Figure 4).<sup>49</sup> It could also have been part of another gothic altarpiece dedicated to the same saint kept at the National Art Museum of Catalonia (MNAC).<sup>50</sup>

Serra i Boldú classifies paternosters into three different types according to their format: the first kind of paternoster is open-ended and consists of a cord ending in a tassel with beads that move freely up and down, the second one has a string of beads placed one after the other but that can move freely, and the third type corresponds to a string in which the beads are joined together with knots (Serra i Boldú 1925, p. 10). Paternosters consisted of varying numbers of beads of different materials, sizes and shapes. Gudiol and Serra i Boldú mention valuable materials ranging from gold, silver, pearl, turquoise, coral, chalcedony, jasper, jet, amber, crystal, glass or ivory, to simpler ones made of bones, tin, terracotta or seeds (Gudiol i Cunill 1923a, p. 12, Serra i Boldú 1925, pp. 14–15). The beads were joined by a red, green or black silk string. Among the Catalan inventories from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the most frequent ones were made of coral, glass, silver, (enamelled or not), jet, as well as plain ones made of wood or seeds. Sometimes, the size (small or large) is specified, as well as the number of beads (30, 40 or even 400 small coral beads). For instance, *a string of paternosters of small coral beads, containing 400 beads*. (Benito i Monclús 2008). They sometimes included complementary elements such as crosses, buttons or rings.

Although their primary function was devotional, being instruments to count prayers, paternosters were also used as clothing accessories or as jewels people wore around their necks or hung from their belts. Actually, they fulfilled an apotropaic function to ward off the devil, which is one of the factors that explains why they were popular among the laity and the clergy (Winston-Allen 1998, p. 116). According to the inventories, the paternosters are carefully kept in small boxes but it is not ruled out that they hung on walls, as seen in some fifteenth-century Flemish paintings.<sup>51</sup>

### 6.2.2. Agni Dei

According to the documentation, Agni Dei were silver or wax objects depicting the representation of the Lamb of God, attached to a blue, purple or green silk ribbon to be worn around the neck or in direct contact with the body.

Agni Dei are often mentioned in the inventories of Catalan laypeople and the clergy. The notaries specified that they were carefully wrapped and stored in boxes, cases and bags, together with reliquaries and jewels, which means they were part of the most valuable possessions of their owners. The oldest one cited, in 1308, belonged to Pere Marí. Queen Constanza's scribe owned an Agnus Dei decorated with silver (Batlle Gallart 1994, p. 252), but two other silver Agni Dei were recorded amongst the objects king James II gave to his daughter Constance in 1312 (Martínez Ferrando 1953–1954, doc. 42, pp. 58–59). In the early fourteenth century, monarchs and the people in their circle owned them. They were already considered to be valuable objects at that time. At the end of this century, these objects appeared often in the inventories as is seen in this detailed reference of 1393: *Case containing a large Agnus Dei, with a blue silk ribbon and covers made of gold cloth*, which belonged to Joan de Peralta, the canon and provost of the Seu Vella cathedral in Lleida (Bolós and Sánchez-Boira 2014, vol. 2, p. 556).

<sup>48</sup> Nowadays kept at the Episcopal Museum in Vic (MEV 14). Only the main panel of the retable from the early fifteenth century. See the museum record: <https://www.museuepiscopalvic.com/ca/colleccions/gotic/compartiment-dun-retaule-dedicat-a-santa-maria-magdalena-mev-14> (consulted on 5 August 2019).

<sup>49</sup> Kept in the Francisco Godia collection. See: (Saura 2008, pp. 100–1).

<sup>50</sup> MNAC 64029-CJT. From the collection of Matias Muntadas.

<sup>51</sup> A crystal paternoster hangs on the wall of the bedroom of Giovanni Arnolfini and his wife in the painting by Jan van Eyck couple (1434). See also: (Hackenbroch 1989).

What is the origin of Agni Dei? Initially, they were made with the wax of the Paschal candle which was lit every year at the opening of the Easter Vigil and was placed near the high altar where it stayed lit until Ascension Day.<sup>52</sup> The Paschal candle and the light emanating from it are symbols of the Resurrection of Christ. That is the reason why the faithful took the remains of the Easter candle home ever since the sixth century. Soon after, between the eighth and twelfth centuries, candle wax was cut in the shape of lambs and later small discs were made from that same wax stamped with the image of the Lamb of God. By the twelfth century, the disc, made with a two-armed mould, was stamped on both sides and it was then that the name of Agnus Dei was attributed to it. The process of manufacturing these objects evolved from mixing the wax with holy anointing oil to the 1488 prescription, which required the wax to be pure, white and unused. The wax was mixed with holy water. Once treated, the wax received the papal blessing. From the fifteenth century onwards, the habit of Popes blessing the Agni Dei the first and seventh year of their pontificates was established. An inscription mentioning the date of the blessing and the name of the pontiff authenticated the Roman origin of the object.

The fact that Agni Dei were widespread is related to the symbolism and virtues attributed to this iconography as well as to the properties of wax. The Agnus Dei is a symbolic image of Jesus Christ himself, as John the Baptist identified him when he met him for the first time at the Jordan River. His words *Ecce Agnus Dei* (Here comes the Lamb of God) clearly refer to the sacrificial sense the Jewish people assigned to this four-legged animal. It was the victim the chosen people offered in sacrifice to Yahweh before leaving Egypt and crossing the Red Sea. It is remembered every year during Passover, one of the most widely celebrated Jewish holidays. To Christians, Jesus represents the new lamb that, by dying on the cross, made the final sacrifice to bring about the salvation of the human race. The Agnus Dei is a symbol of sacrifice and redemption. Additionally, the wax Agni Dei discs were made from offers of new symbolic relations that reinforce the meaning of the image. The wax, with its bright white colour and the touch characteristic of its material, shows similarities to the host, the Body of Christ, as pointed out by several theologians such as Saint Anselm.<sup>53</sup>

In the Late Middle Ages, Agni Dei were considered sacramental objects, that is, blessed objects that were intermediaries of divine grace. They were extra-liturgical objects endowed with sacredness and they also served an apotropaic function as they were believed to protect the people who wore them. This protective function is clear in the poem Pope Urban VII devoted to John VIII Palaiologos in 1362, accompanying the gift with an Agnus Dei. The pontiff's text refers to the beneficial properties of this mystically sanctified object: it helped women give birth, protected people against sudden death, the danger of fires, etc.<sup>54</sup> The mid-sixteenth century *Discorso intorno all'origine, antichità et virtù degli Agnus Dei di cera* of the Dominican Bishop Vincenzo Bonardo (Cooper 2019, p. 22) also lists the circumstances in which Agni Dei provided protective powers to devotees. Agni Dei were thus considered objects of great symbolic significance as they constituted Christological images that emphasized the idea of sacrifice and redemption, thus establishing a connection with the Eucharist. The notaries referred to Agni Dei discs on chains and ribbons, which reveals that laypeople considered them valuable devotional jewels. They were worn close to the body.

The origin of Catalan Agni Dei is not specified in the inventories analysed with the exceptions of the Agnus Dei that belonged to King Martin the Humane, listed in an inventory that dates from 1410, which was a gift from the pontiff to the monarch (Gudiol i Cunill 1902, p. 469). There are only two references to Agni Dei made of wax. One is the Agnus Dei that Jaimes the Second gave to Joan Amell in 1318 (Martínez Ferrando 1953–1954, doc. 96, p. 130) and the second one belonged to Vicent Sopena, the canon of the Seu Vella cathedral in Lleida (1482) (Bolós and Sànchez-Boira 2014, vol. 2, p. 1227).

<sup>52</sup> Regarding Agni Dei: (Gudiol i Cunill 1902, pp. 469–70; Llompert 1966, pp. 7–25; Herradón Figueroa 1999, pp. 171–93; Cherry 2003, pp. 171–83; Musacchio 2005, pp. 139–56; Cooper 2019, pp. 220–43).

<sup>53</sup> Quoted in (Herradón Figueroa 1999, p. 207).

<sup>54</sup> Quoted in (Cooper 2019, p. 227).

It seems that Agni Dei were often made of gold or silver (*gold Agnus Dei and a turquoise stone*) (see Figure 5 for a silver plaque with an Agnus Dei).<sup>55</sup> They were attached to a gold chain (the one Franci de Sentmenat owned) (Broida 1986–1987, p. 256) or to a simple coloured silk ribbon. Unfortunately, we have not been able to find any medieval Agnus Dei in the collections of Catalan museums. Museu Episcopal de Vic has one Agnus Dei of the XVI century with an Epiphany (Figure 6) and there are two wax discs that date from the seventeenth century are preserved at the Diocesan Museum of Tarragona. One is an Agnus Dei from 1630 depicting the shield of Pope Urban VIII on one side and the Coronation of the Virgin Mary on the other side and the other one is a wax medallion portraying the Lamb and Our Lady of the Rosary.<sup>56</sup> The Frederic Marés Museum also owns several pieces.



Figure 5. Agnus Dei and Epiphany. Museu Episcopal de Vic.

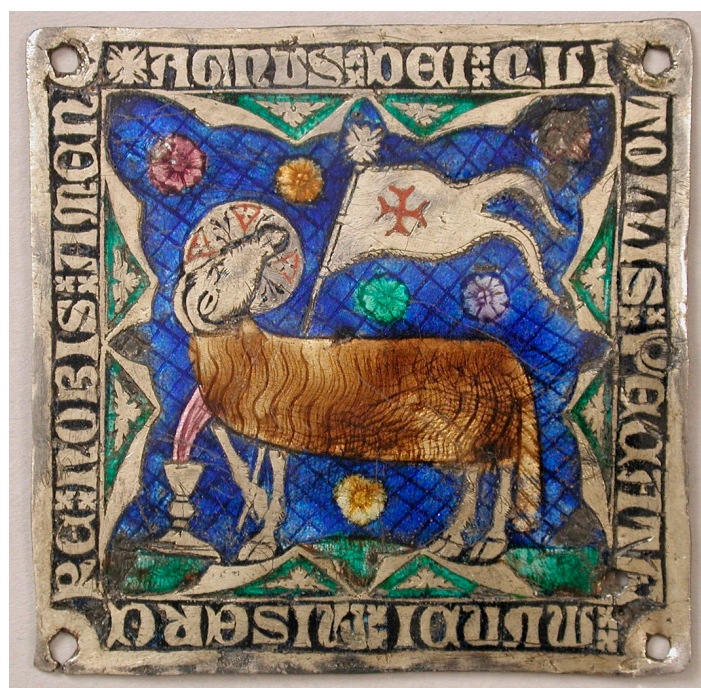


Figure 6. Plaque with Agnus Dei. Made in Catalonia. 14<sup>th</sup> Century. Metropolitan Museum of Art.

<sup>55</sup> Inventory of Gaspar Sanç, sacristan of the Seu Vella cathedral in Lleida (Bolós and Sánchez-Boira 2014, vol. 2, p. 1281).

<sup>56</sup> I thank Sofia Mata, curator of the diocesan Museum in Tarragona, for the information provided on these pieces. The objects are MDT 1669 (Agnus Dei depicting the shield of Pope Urban VIII) and MDT 2366. A third Agnus Dei disc made of wax is registered in a bag containing gospels (MDT 0823).

### 6.2.3. Reliquaries

Francesc Ferrer, a pharmacist, possessed a *gold reliquary with its gold chain* (Batlle Gallart 1994, p. 525) which he kept locked in a small box. Raimond Malats, a money changer from Barcelona, had a similar object: *a chiseled gold reliquary containing six pearls with the image of the Pietà and a black cord* (Soler i Palet 1916b, p. 390). This kind of reliquary was portable, made of gold or silver and embellished with small-sized stones, and included a chain or ribbon to hang around the neck to be worn close to the body.<sup>57</sup> One of the earliest examples of these portable reliquaries is the Talisman of Charlemagne, although other pieces from the late medieval period have survived. At the end of the Middle Ages, those portable reliquaries were popular among kings and the nobility. In Catalonia, they were also common among members of the emerging urban bourgeoisie, as shown in the examples.<sup>58</sup> The portable nature of the reliquaries is related to the personal experience of the sacred sought for in the Late Middle Ages. Direct contact of a sacred object with the body emphasises the personal experience of something that is holy and that, as such, also sanctifies the space or the person in contact with it. In accordance with how medieval people thought, relics transmit the *virtus* of the saint, in such a way that the people who touched them were imbued with it. In the case of portable reliquaries, this transmission of virtues and of the sacred became a private experience in line with the spirituality of that time.

In the above-mentioned examples, the notaries did not specify the saint the relics belonged to. It is the case of Guillem Ferrer, a merchant who owned: *a yellow velvet bag containing some relics which I, Isabel (woman), affirm to be mine (hers)* (Casas Homs 1970, p. 48). Although they were kept in a velvet bag, their spiritual value is evident because the widow of the deceased rushed to claim their ownership. However, it is interesting to note that the iconography of the reliquary is related to the type of relic it contains. The reliquary of Raimond Malats is a representation of the Pietà, which could be associated with certain Christological relics or with elements (soil, oil and water) from the Holy Land. This object can be related to Pere Baçet's relic holder: *first, a small golden reliquary including seven pearls ( . . . ) around it and one part has been pierced and the holes contain small pearls; the other part, which opens and closes, contains three images, one of the Crucifix and two more* (Martorell and Valls i Taverner 1911–1912, p. 624). It is, once more, a small-sized piece the front part of which opens and it is decorated with pearls and a representation of the Crucifix. Although there is no mention of a chain, this kind of piece suggests that it was conceived to be worn as a pendant.

Of the documented reliquaries, the most exceptional one is the one described in the inventory of Pere de Queralt: *a silver case and silver arm which contains the finger of Saint John* (Costa 1983, p. 126), kept inside a box of the painted room, probably the bedroom of the couple. It is a so-called “speaking” reliquary, a kind of reliquary shaped like a body part, imitating the shape of the relic it contains. In this case, it has the shape of an arm and contains the finger of St John. Pere de Queralt thus owned a valuable relic, perhaps acquired during one of the diplomatic trips he made when he was in the service of Martin the Humane.

## 7. Devotional Objects and Social Estates: A Brief Approach to Its Study

An analysis of devotional objects in relation to the social status of their owners is outside the scope of this article. However, some preliminary issues may be pointed out. As said, the eighty-five inventories analysed correspond to the so-called *braç reial* or *braç popular*, which, like the *braç militar*, was divided into two large groups: the upper estate (honourable citizens) formed by urban oligarchies that held the reins of citizen power, and the lower estate, which consisted of merchants, artists

<sup>57</sup> See examples of this kind of reliquaries in: (Treasures of Heaven 2010, cat. 72 to 76, pp. 131–33).

<sup>58</sup> Regarding this kind of reliquary referring to the talisman of Charlemagne: (Robinson 2011, pp. 110–16). Owning reliquaries was already a phenomenon observed during the first centuries of Christianity and which reaches all the social strata in the Middle Ages, see: (Klein 2010, pp. 153–75; Smith 2014, pp. 23–46; Blick 2014, pp. 110–15).

(intellectual and liberal professions such as doctors, lawyers and notaries) and *menestrals* (craftsmen). The inventories analysed include a significant sample of people belonging to those four groups. There were eight honourable citizens, seventeen merchants, fourteen artists and thirty-three *menestrals*. Of all the inventories studied, only twelve did not itemise any devotional objects (eight *menestrals*, two merchants, one apothecary and one whose social status is unknown).

In order to correctly interpret the data, it must be taken into consideration that there was a considerable increase in religious objects from the thirteenth century up to the year 1500. Having said that, figures indicate the existence of devotional objects was a generalized phenomenon that permeated all the social estates in the fifteenth century. This is shown by the fact that of the seventy-one inventories analysed from the fifteenth century, only six did not contain any devotional objects and in five cases the owners were *menestrals*. A direct relation is observed between the owners' wealth and the number of objects they possessed. Thus, while for artisans and artists, the average number of objects was usually one or two, despite the existence of exceptions, for merchants and honourable citizens the average number usually ranged between four and five, although there are cases in which ten to fourteen<sup>59</sup> objects are listed. Among the honourable citizens, the cases of Pere de Queralt, who owned seven objects (1408), and of Antoni Mura, who had eleven objects (1463), stand out.

With respect to the type of objects, it is necessary to mention that retables, oratories, images, painted cloths and paternosters were inventoried in the homes of people who belonged to all the different estates. However, in the houses of merchants, a proportionally higher number of retables, oratories and images is observed in comparison to the other groups. They possessed eighteen oratories, fifteen retables and eight images, while *menestrals* owned sixteen oratories, nine retables and six images. However, proportions change significantly with regard to painted cloths. Twenty-six were registered in the homes of craftsmen and thirteen in the houses of merchants. Objects considered particularly valuable such as reliquaries and Agni Dei were similar in number in the homes of honourable citizens, merchants and artists but none were inventoried in the dwellings of craftsmen.

This brief quantitative overview, which should be compared with an analysis of materials and iconographies, reflects the process of the enrichment of the Catalan middle classes, in which merchants and traders played a significant part. This phenomenon was also observed in the large European cities of that time. The case of Guillem Ferrer, a Barcelona merchant who died in 1398, and that of Joan Berenguer de Junyent (late fifteenth century) serve to illustrate the variety of devotional objects as well as their devotion. Among the belongings of Ferrer, fourteen objects were registered. There were two retables, one oratory, all dedicated to the Virgin and the saints, two pavises displaying the image of Saint George, six paternosters and three valuable objects, two of them of a marked Christological nature: a bag containing relics, a silver Agnus Dei and (a cord of?) the size of the tomb of Christ. A century later, Junyent possessed a Holy Face of Our Lady, four figures of the Mother of God (two silver ones of the Virgin of Montserrat, one wooden figure and one made of terra cotta), three oratories (two of the Virgin and the third one showing the Annunciation), a gold paten and a wooden crib with the name of Jesus written on it (Soler i Palet 1916a, pp. 303–4).

## 8. Conclusions

The objective of the present study is to make an initial approach to devotional objects by means of the information gathered from post-mortem inventories. As seen above, those documents are a privileged documentary source that reflects the lives and possessions of families in the Late Middle Ages. Those extensive lists of registered objects constitute the material universe of medieval laypeople and are an eloquent expression of the beliefs, interests, habits and pastimes that filled their existence.

This final section is organized into three parts referring to the three elements that compose domestic devotion: space, objects and people.

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<sup>59</sup> This is the case of Pere Girgós (1389); Guillem Ferrer (1398); Joan Berenguer de Junyent (at the end of the fifteenth century).



First of all, post-mortem inventories show that private chapels were uncommon and were only found in the dwellings of the wealthiest members of the *braç reial*. By contrast, the presence of devotional objects is observed in the rooms that constitute the most intimate spaces in the homes of laypeople: bedrooms, offices and dining rooms. Although those rooms basically performed secular functions, the presence of objects such as retables or oratories, images, reliquaries, Agni Dei or paternosters sacralised those domestic spaces, converting them into the stage of the direct, intimate and personal relationship devotees established with the Divine.

Secondly, the inventories analysed allow identifying and quantifying the devotional objects in Catalan homes at the end of the Middle Ages. They became more numerous as time went on and a considerable number of them were from the period just before the Modern Age. Of all the registered items, almost two hundred and fifty were religious objects or items containing religious images. There were retables, painted cloths, oratories, images, paternosters, reliquaries, panels, Agnus Dei, curtains, boards, pieces of bright silk fabric, cases, chalices, altars, pavises and a music stand. The most numerous objects were the domestic replicas of the large pieces of furniture that decorated the high altars and side chapels of urban and rural churches: retables, oratories and images. The difference is that in those spaces the function of altarpieces was primarily liturgical, while in the domestic environment retables, oratories and images performed a devotional function and use. Apart from this large number of items, it is worth mentioning those religious objects of personal use that helped prayer such as paternosters or those stressing God's protection or the ones conferring some kind of grace like Agni Dei. Brush cloths, which decorated the walls of dining rooms and other spaces in homes, are also worth noting. Although they were not strictly considered to be devotional objects, they contributed to making Salvation History part of laypeople's daily lives.

Thirdly, it is imperative to address the interaction between laity and devotional objects, an authentic expression of domestic piety. Inventories are a quantitative source but they do not provide any detailed information on the use of the objects or on the interaction between owners and objects and this is a limitation of the study of medieval domestic devotion. The growing number of devotional objects itemised in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in the homes of citizens that belonged to the *braç reial* shows the interest of the laity in this kind of objects. The presence of those objects in their bedrooms and the type, size and material of the retables and oratories points to their everyday use. Considering Francesc Eiximenis and Saint Vincent Ferrer recommended morning and evening prayers and preachers encouraged the practice of prayer in private and secluded spaces, there is every reason to believe that retables and images were part of laypeople's daily religious practice. It included contemplating and meditating on the life of Christ, the Virgin and the saints. The figurative representations they looked at in the retables or oratories hanging on the walls of their rooms, displayed on a piece of furniture or held in their hands were used as visual and tactile support. Interacting with those objects involved much more than simply a visual relationship. The fact of kneeling or lying on the cold ground; reaching the image to touch, caress or kiss it; covering it with a curtain and showing it later or lighting a candle entailed an intimate and personal experience that aroused their senses and touched their souls. Said actions, often accompanied by devotional readings or the repetition of vocal prayers, generated empathy and feelings of union with Jesus Christ and the Virgin in the faithful, which was the ultimate objective of *Imitatio Christi*. In contrast to the wide variety of hagiographic themes represented in temples, it is no surprise that the images that appear the most in the post-mortem inventories analysed are Marian and Christological. The latter depict themes related to the Passion of Christ (the Crucifixion, the Virgin's compassion, *homo pietatis* and the Veronica of Christ, which have also been found in Majorcan and Valencian homes. Paternosters, Agnus Dei and reliquaries are also part of this supernatural experience that penetrates and intensifies the senses such as touch and sight. The chain, ribbon or string described in the inventories indicate direct contact with the body. The fact of wearing those objects close to the heart and the possibility of touching them with their hands not only favoured a tangible experience of divine protection against the forces of evil but

also close contact with a sacred object that transmitted sacredness and was considered a means of understanding sanctifying grace (Hamm 2016).

In summary, retables, oratories and images, as well as reliquaries and Agni Dei, had the power to act as mediators between laypeople and God. The materiality and tangibility of these objects and their understanding through touch and sight, made the experience of the Divine more intimate and personal but also more impacting and effective.<sup>60</sup> In accordance with the value given by theologians to tangible objects, they became means to access a direct relationship with God without the need of other intermediaries as was encouraged in the Devotio Moderna. The use the laity made of those devotional objects connects with what was called the “materiality” of religion at the end of the Middle Ages: the use of images and a wide array of objects that contributed to generating a personal experience of God based on material and on the understanding of the spiritual and the supernatural.

### Images

1. Saint Catherine praying before an image of Our Lady (second half of the 14th century). Robert Lehman collection. Metropolitan Museum of Art (1975.1.62)
2. Veronica of Our Lady. © Museu Episcopal de Vic (MEV 1885). Photo: Joan M. Díaz.
3. Nativity scene of the Pedralbes monastery in Barcelona. Reial Monestir de Santa Maria de Pedralbes (MMT 148–207). Foto: Jordi Puig
4. Altarpiece of Saint Maria Magdalena de Perella. © Museu Episcopal de Vic (MEV 47). Photo: Gabriel Salvans
5. Agnus Dei with Epiphany. © Museu Episcopal de Vic (MEV 17262). Photo: Joan M. Díaz.
6. Plaque with Agnus Dei. Made in Catalonia. 14th century. Metropolitan Museum of Art (17.190.970).

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<sup>60</sup> Abundant literature exists on the “materiality” and tangibility of Christianity and the relevance of understanding through the senses at the end of the Middle Ages. See among others: Bynum (2007, 2011), Rubin (2009) and Jørgensen et al. (2015) and Laugerud et al. (2016).

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