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Locating the Body in Late Medieval Reval

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The city of which I want to tell you has a strange legend. Namely, the native inhabitants of Reval have passed on since the time immemorial a story of the Cathedral Hill as the seed of the city, erected there when the giantess Linda put down the mighty rock to mark a tombstone for her beloved, the strong Kalev. And so a grave stands as the foundation of this city (Bergengruen 1965: 11-12, trans. Elina Gertsman).

If Gaston Bachelard was right, and the perceived immensity of space points not only to a body of impressions but also to the physical body that perceives certain places as limitless (1994: 181-89), what does it tell us about the lore that placed the medieval Livonian city of Tallinn (modern-day Estonia) atop and around the grave of the colossal body of the folk hero Kalev? Tallinn's upper town, Toompea, is believed to be his tomb; by implication, the lower town, called Reval in the Middle Ages, subsists on the giant's decomposed flesh, his bones forming the city's very foundation. The body of the city, which rests on the immensity of Kalev's body, is therefore simultaneously imaginary and physical, limitless and delineated.

The body is an essential trope in the mythology of any city, and medieval Reval was constituted through the intersection of various kinds of bodies—political, social, narrative, and represented. A key limb in the merchant body of the Hanseatic League, for which the town of Lübeck served as the administrative head, Reval was mapped by its inhabitants whose living bodies connected and defined social loci through commercial, devotional, and civic activity. Medieval Reval was what David Summers (2003: 43) calls 'a real space', differentiated by institutions, hierarchies, and social relations, a space 'articulated by relations of artifacts to the real spatial conditions of our embodied existences'. The political and social make-up of Reval's living bodies undoubtedly dictated the representational stress on the body within the city's visual foci: the St Nicholas Church, the Church of the Holy Spirit, and the Dominican convent of St Catherine. These buildings, along with St Olaf's Church, the Town Hall and its square, St Michael's nunnery, the guild houses, and the harbour, constituted what Françoise Choay (1986: 165) terms

the ‘semantically-charged maxi-elements’ of a merchant city. In focusing on three altarpieces and their articulation of the devotional body, we will outline here the communal and experiential geography of Reval, locating it within the urban fabric of the body-politic.

Casting memory as a tool that maps out the subjectivity of familiar sites, Michel de Certeau (1984: 117) defines a place as ‘an instantaneous configuration of positions’ that ‘implies an indication of stability’, and a space as ‘a practiced place’ created by ‘intersections of mobile elements’. Our study of Reval reads it as a space, constituted and temporalised by its devotional elements, visual and material, represented and lived, observable and observed. These devotional elements are mobilised through the spatial dynamic of multi-panelled altarpieces, painted and carved, predicated on the somatic interaction that defines their very nature. The altarpieces become substantial only in relation to the body: the body of Christ as it transforms on the altar, the body of the officiating priest, and the bodies of congregants.

In and of themselves, such polyptychs can be read as bodies: it is no accident that the main framework of the altarpiece, onto which the wings are hinged, is called a *corpus*. Like a living body, it foregrounds the aesthetics of the hidden, what Bachelard (1994: xxxix) calls ‘the dialectics of within and without’. Bachelard’s discussion of poetic images of household furnishings—caskets and wardrobes, for instance—can inform the viewing practices connected with multi-panelled altarpieces, which are physically conceived as large cabinets. They play, therefore, with notions of enclosure and revelation: their movable character enables the wings to be opened and closed in accordance with days of the week and the liturgical calendar.¹ Filled with ‘veritable organs’, as Bachelard puts it, these objects bridge the gap between the animate and the inanimate: ‘They are hybrid objects, subject objects. Like us, through us and for us, they have a quality of intimacy’ (Bachelard 1994: 78). These subject objects form the core of our inquiry here.

The Body of the City: The Church of the Holy Spirit

Completed by Bernt Notke and his workshop in 1483, the altarpiece in the Church of the Holy Spirit (Püha Vaimu) should be seen within the context of the hospital complex to which the church belonged.² The altarpiece’s stress on bodily suffering, and the consistent comparison between the bodies of the infirm and Christ’s own flesh, made it a fitting image for the almshouse church. Moreover, the exultation of

¹ On the rhetoric of secrecy and enclosure in late medieval imagery see, for instance, Gertsman (2009).

² For bibliography, concise description of the technical details, and the discussion of the identity of the painters and sculptors, see Petermann (2000: 94-111, 243-45).

the Virgin and the apostles at Pentecost, sculpted within the third opening of the altarpiece, promises the healing of body and soul by the Holy Spirit.

The exterior of the outer wings is painted with images of Christ as the Man of Sorrows on the viewer's left, and St Elisabeth of Thuringia (d. 1231) on the viewer's right [figure 1]. The appearance of St Elisabeth on the altarpiece is not surprising: she spent her brief life and substantial funds founding hospitals, distributing alms, and serving the sick, first as the wife of Landgrave Ludwig, then as a member of the Franciscan tertiary order. Pictorial cycles dedicated to Elisabeth often appeared within hospital complexes, such as those of Langhaus (c. 1350), Lübeck (c. 1440) and Hersbruck (c. 1510). The *Golden Legend* includes vivid images of Elisabeth ministering to the infirm: 'she shrank not from the sores of the sick [...]. She applied their remedies, cleansed their wounds with the veil of her head, and handled them with her own hands, paying no heed to the protests of her handmaidens'. Equally dramatic are descriptions of Elisabeth's self-mortification and of the disciplines imposed by her spiritual director, Master Conrad of Marburg, who once, for a minor transgression, 'had her so severely whipped that for three weeks the marks of the cords could be seen upon her' (Jacobus de Voragine 1969: 679, 684).

In the outer wings of the Püha Vaimu altarpiece, however, any sign of bodily suffering is hidden underneath Elisabeth's voluminous cloak, contrasted with Christ's exposed, bleeding flesh on the opposite wing. Compositional similarities emphasise the juxtaposition of the two bodies. Both Christ and Elisabeth stand within arched openings of what appear to be stone balconies of a Gothic edifice; hanging from each ledge is a richly embroidered cloth superimposed by the Reval coat of arms.³ While Elisabeth is placed against an uncluttered fragment of sky, behind the Man of Sorrows stretches a miniature city, its inhabitants as small and numerous as the droplets of Christ's blood that cover his face, arms, legs, and torso. His is the image of torment; hers, the image of serenity.

Christ's sacrificial body is repeated thrice on the left wing: the Trinitarian Man of Sorrows towers above the chalice and the host, in turn superimposed over Reval's coat of arms that here bears the *arma Christi* (the Instruments of Christ's Passion) and is therefore figured as Christ's own flesh. The shield—a white cross on the red background—is nailed to the wooden cross; the vertical bars of both crosses are flush with one another. The earliest known devotional image of the shield-shaped *arma*, found in a French Book of Hours (c. 1300), is accompanied by text explaining that the white ground against which the cross and other Instruments are

³ This was also the coat of arms used by the Great Guild. On the possibility that this symbol of the town and the Guild was also understood as the shield of St Victor, see Mänd (2009a: 365).

displayed represents the flesh of Christ.⁴ Here, remarkably, the body of the city and Christ's body have been conflated, Christ's flesh turning appropriately bloody. To dispel any doubts about this conflation, one nail is painted in perspective, as if used to attach Reval's coat of arms, here figured as Christ's body, to the wooden cross.

This nail's double duty makes evident the disorienting spatial ambiguity of the panel. On the top right of the shield, for instance, Peter denies knowing Christ to a maidservant of the high priest (Mark 14:66-68), whose headdress extends beyond the confines of the shield. Similarly, some of the instruments of torture, such as the whips and the column, are so rendered as to be seen as real objects floating in front of the shield, rather than painted on it. The wooden cross, likewise, is positioned in the uncertain, fluid space: its crossbar appears to rest on the stone ledge of the balcony, pressing down the embroidered cloth, and yet the vertical beam is placed in front of the balcony and its moulding at the bottom. Finally, three thin streams of blood, which stretch from Christ's wounds to the chalice like fine threads, pour out and downwards, projected from the divine realm of Christ's suffering towards the viewer's realm as Eucharistic offering. Christ's body, inasmuch as it occupies every space at once, implicates the beholder's faculty of vision—in effect, the beholder's body—in negotiating these spaces.

The second view of the altarpiece is similarly dedicated to Christ and St Elisabeth, [figure 2]. Four episodes from Elisabeth's *vita* frame four Passion scenes. The eight discursively intertwined panels maintain the focus on the body, suffering but also healed, of the outer wings. The images on the left wing, painted on the obverse of the Man of Sorrows, figure Elisabeth as a pious woman, praying at the altar above, dying after being confessed below. The upper scene focuses on Christ's body, doubling it in an uncanny way: in the painted golden retable that stands at the back of the altar, Mary and infant Jesus look up at the sculpted crucifix propped in front of them, mother and child beholding the future torments of Christ's flesh. Elisabeth's gaze, in turn, seems trained on Christ painted in the adjacent panel. Christ appears to reciprocate her gaze as he turns away from Pilate and towards Elisabeth. In the panel to the right, the wounded and bleeding Christ, surrounded by his tormentors, inclines his head towards the left side of the altarpiece where Elisabeth kneels. On the right-most panel, Elisabeth nurses the elderly and ministers to the sick, while the man whose feet she is washing transforms into Christ. Here, Christ's prophecy of the Last Judgment plays out as the drama of Elisabeth's life: 'For I was hungry, and you gave me to eat: I was thirsty, and you gave me to drink: I was a stranger, and you took me in: Naked, and you covered me: sick, and you visited me [...]

⁴ On *arma Christi* see Berliner (1955: 35-152) and Suckale (1977: 177-208); Schiller (1972: 192) and Smith (2003: 175-77) discuss the shield as Christ's body in this and other illuminations.

Amen I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to me' (Matthew 25:35-40). As a vehicle of devotion and healing, the kneeling Elisabeth serves as a visual parenthesis to the four scenes that foreground Christ's tormented body.

The right-most panel in the lower register features one of Elisabeth's most dramatic miracles: the transformation of the leper, whom she put in her own marital bed, into the crucified Christ. The bedcover is pulled away; Elisabeth reveals to her husband, Landgrave Ludwig, Christ's bleeding form. The contrast between the diminutive body of Christ—Elisabeth's spiritual spouse—and the body of Ludwig, her terrestrial husband and the father of her three children, is striking. Ludwig dominates the room: the largest figure there, he is luxuriously attired; his pointy shoes echo the downturned point of his imposing sword. Conversely, the small size of the crucified Christ recalls contemporary images of the *Pietà corpusculum*, meant to evoke pity and compassion. Michael Camille (2002: 245, 253) links the late-medieval pictorial miniaturisation of Christ to feminisation and infantilisation: it makes Christ 'into an object of desire, vulnerable and yet paradoxically powerful', and transforms his body into the site of eroticism. Christ's humanity can also be read in his erection, made conspicuous by the see-through fabric, which provides a poignant counterpoint to Ludwig's downturned sword; as Leo Steinberg (1996: 24) famously postulates, '[t]he humanation of God entails, along with mortality, his assumption of sexuality'. The two bed scenes frame the lower register of the altarpiece, much as Elisabeth's kneeling body does in the register above.

That the sick body transforms into a holy body in both panels on the right must have carried a particular significance for viewers within the context of the hospital complex. Though the panels do not explicitly promise healing—indeed, torment or death invades every space in this altarpiece opening—the conflation of the sick, dying, or dead body with sacred flesh lends suffering a hallowed quality, and promises cleansing and redemption even to those whose bodily disease, like that of the young leper invited into Elisabeth's bed, was considered to be a sign of a sinful soul (Moore 1990; Metzler 2006). Discussing medieval healing practices, Marcia Kupfer points out that '[v]ision meant incorporation and eventual self-transformation [...]; because seeing in such a manner implicated the psychosomatic unity of the person, images could serve as potent adjuncts to therapeutic regimes' (2003: 1). Neither Christ nor Elisabeth engages the viewer's gaze even once: their bodies are meant for beholding, not interaction. The transformative rhetoric of the altarpiece invites performative voyeurship, figuring Christ and Elisabeth as unattainable models of an experience that carries curative powers.⁵ Here, to borrow

⁵ See Hayum (1989) on the similar dynamic at work in the Isenheim Altarpiece.

again from Camille, ‘the human body [comes] into its own as a site of spectacle and metaphorical projection’ (1994: 66).

The third, and final, view of the altarpiece is carved: here, the Holy Spirit descends upon the Virgin and the apostles around her [figure 3]. Four saints occupy the wings, and among them is St Elisabeth, whose presence links the painted wings to the sculpted interior: her canonisation was celebrated at Pentecost in 1235. Mary, enthroned as the sovereign of Livonia, is here added to the Biblical account of Pentecost to become the main protagonist of the narrative carved as if upon a stage: the three-dimensionality and striking depth of the sculpted interior invite the viewer to become part of the holy drama.⁶ The culmination of it is healing, considered to be one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:9), but Pentecost also alludes to the formation of the Church itself as the mystical body of Christ—‘a living body’, according to Edvard Muir, ‘that carried on Christ’s authority in contrast to the “dead letter” of scripture’ (1997: 67). At Püha Vaimu, then, the visual journey that maps suffering bodies—the tortured, the wretched, the infirm, the destitute—concludes with the curative vision of living grace.

The Intercessory Body: the Dominican Convent

A short walk from Püha Vaimu and its hospital complex stood the Dominican convent on Monks’ Street. The Dominicans had arrived in Reval soon after the establishment of the order, in the mid- or late 1220s (Kala 2003: 63-67). Today stripped bare, the church once housed several altars and numerous devotional works of art, including a large altarpiece jointly commissioned by the influential Black Heads confraternity, the patrons of the convent, and the Great Guild (Mänd 2007a: 39-40, 53). The altarpiece now in the Niguliste Museum, Tallinn, was made in Bruges in the workshop of the Master of the St Lucy Legend c. 1490 (Lumiste 1961: 32-42; Verhaegen 1961: 142-54; Reidna 1995; Mänd 2000; 2007a; 2007b).

The Annunciation scene, painted on the exterior panels of the outer wings, is rendered in grisaille, a common device in fifteenth-century Netherlandish tradition. The Virgin and the archangel Gabriel are figured as architectural sculpture, standing in the niches underneath colourful baldachins [figure 4]. When the first set of wings opens, the scene shows the fulfillment of what the grisaille Annunciation had promised. The second view of the altarpiece figures Double—or, more accurately, Triple—Intercession [figure 5]. In the middle, Christ, surrounded

⁶ Mary was considered to be the patroness of the Teutonic Order (Réau 1958: 417-21) which had played a crucial role in the Christianisation of Livonia, and hence of the entire area (*The Chronicle of Henry of Livonia* 1961: 40, 152, 160). See Karling (1946: 153) on the narrative dynamics and theatricality of the altarpiece.

by the Instruments of his Passion, kneels before God the Father, while the two outer panels show Mary, on the left, and St John the Baptist, on the right, interceding on behalf of the donors of the altarpiece. Here, the bodily symmetries—which extend beyond the groups of the diminutive supplicants mirroring one another, and the gestures of Mary and John who protectively place a hand on the kneeling men’s heads—write their own visual narrative of the body. The Virgin lifts her bare breast in order to plead for mercy for mankind, and, echoing her gesture, Christ opens his wound in front of God the Father who wears the papal *triregnum*. As Barbara Newman (2003: 262) remarks on Double Intercession imagery, Christ and Mary ‘share a filial role as advocates for sinners’. The similar gestures of presentation equate Mary’s milk and Christ’s blood, investing them with intercessory power. The equation both stresses, as Caroline Walker Bynum (1991: 106) shows, the role of Christ as a nurturer, and endows Mary’s own body with Eucharistic qualities. Emphasis on the sacrificial flesh is underscored by the Instruments of Passion, held by angels: cross, nails, whips, and crown of thorns. Christ’s intercessory plea, therefore, although it centres on his wound, is framed by the entire torture apparatus that inflicted pain on his body.

By the later Middle Ages the Virgin’s milk came to play an important role in pietistic lore: for example, *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, one of the most popular fourteenth-century devotional manuals, states that Mary, inspired by the Holy Ghost, washed her baby after the birth with her own milk, ‘her breasts filled by heaven’ (1961: 33). This was understood as a symbolic act, or a manifestation of pure tenderness, as Christ was born spotless. Unlike the Christ Child, however, guild members gathered under the cloak of the Virgin could benefit from the purifying property of her milk. Conversely, those portrayed under the protection of St John the Baptist—who holds his attribute, the Lamb of God, and whose gesture echoes those of Mary and Christ—tapped directly into the power of Christ’s blood and flesh.

The presence of the Baptist alludes to Last Judgment, an iconography that often includes the Virgin and St John interceding for sinners. The second view of the altarpiece, then, is marked by liminality, positioned as it is in-between. The guild members, their ultimate fate not yet determined, are figured in the liminal space between life and afterlife, a visual statement underscored by the position of the intercession scene physically sandwiched between the outer wings and interior panels.

The final opening of the altarpiece figures the celestial sphere [figure 6]. In the *corpus*, the enthroned Virgin and Christ Child are flanked by two soldiers, St Victor of Marseilles (who, as has recently been suggested, was the patron saint of Reval),

and St George, who was favoured by the Black Heads (Mänd 2009a). St Gertrude of Nivelles and St Francis of Assisi are painted in the wings. The decision to represent the founder of the Grey Friars in a Dominican church is, mildly speaking, unusual, and points, perhaps, to the importance of the wounded body topos stressed in the second opening. The presence of Francis displaying his stigmata echoes the Double Intercession scene, and carries an additional mnemonic function: Francis's wounds enabled the observer to remember what at the moment was hidden from view—Christ's wound and its counterpart, the Virgin's breast.

But Christ himself, of course, is present in this image as well; indeed, he appears twice, as a naked baby on his mother's lap, and as a crucified man on the cross in St Victor's hand. The two are visually linked: the diagonal slant of the crucifix echoes the position of the child on Mary's lap, and the white cloth on which the infant sits both emphasises his innocent flesh and calls attention to a loincloth on the tortured body on the cross. The reference to sacrifice is also shown in the figure of Mary, who, sitting rigidly on an elaborate throne and holding her Child, is associated with the altar on which the body of the offering was placed (Lane 1984). Here, the temporal shift not only results in the visceral juxtaposition between the innocent infant and his own wounded, suffering body, but also points out the very artifice of the painted image. Unlike the scene in the Püha Vaimu altarpiece, which includes Elisabeth praying before the sculpted crucifix and the painted Mary and Child retable, here the crucified Christ is figured as an *image*, while the Child is ostensibly *real*—albeit both are painted representations that stand above the altar where the Real Presence is confirmed during each Mass as bread and wine transform into Christ's body and blood.

Transformation is, then, a key to reading and locating the bodies of this altarpiece. Mary's body, for instance, traces the act of Incarnation as she transforms from the virtuous maiden of the Annunciation to the mother of all humanity who intercedes on behalf of her children through the power of her flesh, and, finally, to the splendidly attired Queen of Heaven enthroned in glory. Christ's body, nothing but a promise on the exterior of the outer wings, becomes the tool of negotiation in the second opening, and is rendered palpably human in the simultaneous portrayal of Infancy and Passion in the interior panel. The bodies of the viewers are implicated in this series of transformations as well: they are invited, first, to contemplate the mystery of Christ's conception; to imagine, subsequently, the moment of judgement rendered hopeful by the intercession of Christ, the Virgin and the Baptist; and to visualise the heavenly sphere where the Virgin with her retinue greets her new subjects. The wings of the altarpiece, then, function as gates to a heavenly palace: from the

colourless porch the pious are led, via the splendid waiting room, to the great hall that welcomes them to eternal life.

The Familiar Body: the St Nicholas Church

A rather different visual gateway greeted parishioners of the St Nicholas Church (Niguliste), located just southwest of the Town Hall Square. It is often difficult to say which places of worship in Reval catered to which urban group in the fifteenth century, but Niguliste, although likely home to a mixed congregation, largely served the merchant body of the city. The body theme runs through the entire edifice: St Nicholas's, veritably peppered with tombstones, also housed Bernt Notke's famous Dance of Death (after 1463). The painting, which featured a throng of representatives of various estates accompanied by enlivened macabre bodies, articulated and invited a wide range of somatic readings and performative experiences (Gertsman 2003: 143-59; 2010, chapter 4; Freytag 1993). Some of these experiences were predicated on the identification between the protagonists of the Dance and the Niguliste parishioners—burghers, merchants, and craftsmen—and the rhetoric of identification similarly informs and governs the viewing dynamic of the altarpiece that stood on the high altar of the church.

The congregation of St Nicholas's had collected money for several years to acquire this new 'tafele', and in 1481 it arrived from Lübeck, from the workshop of Hermen Rode (Karling 1946: 118-47; Raam 1976: 38-46; Mänd 2009b; Rasche 2001). The exterior of its outer wings is painted with images of six saints, including St Nicholas of Myra, the patron saint of the church, and St Victor, whose visual hagiographies fill the second opening of the altarpiece [figure 7], while the third view shows a wide array of sculpted saints [figure 8]. The bodies visualised on Rode's altarpiece established a particular resonance with congregants' bodies by placing the holy figures into a realm familiar to the parishioners.

St Nicholas is figured throughout the second opening of the altarpiece as a respectable bishop with an eventful career—a narrative, as we will shortly see, vastly different from that of St Victor. Nicholas's miracles frequently involved the sea—the Devil in the guise of a nun comes by sea to trick the pilgrims into burning down Nicholas's church; Nicholas, in turn, arrives on his own ship to thwart them; grain, shipped during famine, multiplies miraculously; but the central event pictured in the Niguliste altarpiece most clearly designates him as the patron of sailors and merchants. The *Golden Legend* provides the following account: 'One day certain seamen, being in peril on the deep, prayed as follows, with tears: "Nicholas, servant of God, if what we have heard of thee is true, let us make trial of it at this moment."' (1969: 18) At once there appeared before them someone who had the guise of the

saint, and said to them: “You called me, here I am!” And he began to assist them with the sails and the ropes and the other tackle of the ship; and in the twinkling of an eye the storm ceased.⁷ In Rode’s altarpiece, the ship is caught in a rather placid storm; the sailors navigate the river likely meant to represent Trave, which connected the Baltic Sea to Lübeck, and, therefore, served as a pathway for those merchant goods exchanged between Reval and the capital of the Hanseatic League. That Nicholas appears to the Reval merchants is made clear by the insignia that decorates the prow of the ship: the alternating arms of the Great Guild and the Black Heads Guild. Nicholas here represents and protects the merchant bodies of Reval, and his authoritative, respectable body, handled throughout the altarpiece with utmost restraint, is resonant with theirs.

Restraint, however, can hardly describe the pictorial *vita* of St Victor that unfolds alongside that of St Nicholas, and is dominated by the events of his martyrdom. Nicholas meets his solemn death in the presence of the church officials, and is subsequently carried to heaven, hands folded in prayer, clad in a loincloth and a mitre, for, as Bynum shows, ‘souls were gendered and ranked, bearing with them the marks of occupation, status, religious vocation, even martyrdom’ (1995: 10). Conversely, the patron saint of Reval—headless, bleeding, and almost naked—is thrown to the river by his persecutors. The Middle Low German text underneath the image states: ‘Here they cast his body into the sea and the angels bring him to the land and he will be honourably buried.’⁸ Even when held by the angels, Victor remains nothing but a collection of parts: a dismembered body, a disembodied head. If St Nicholas points to the professional identity of the merchants, St Victor exemplifies their urban, *lived* body whose macabre ordeal underscores their terrestrial vulnerability and points, perhaps, to fifteenth-century anxieties about resurrection. That his body can be read as the body of the city is clearly figured by the Lübeck cityscape that stretches in the background. Victor’s body is thrown and subsequently fished out of the Trave, which here connects two key sites for the Reval merchants: the urban body of Lübeck, safely encased in the city walls, and the living city of Reval, embodied in its patron saint.

If the second opening of the altarpiece indicates the professional and urban identities of the parishioners, the final opening suggests meditation on the familial body. Amid the holy figures, in the middle of the upper row, the crowned Virgin is

⁷ The text in the painting states: ‘Hir lyden schyplude grote[n] not va[n] storm vn[d] wi[n]de vn[d] se repe[n] s[a]ncte nyclus an vn[d] he halp en’. We are grateful to Triin Hallas and Anu Mänd for furnishing us with the transcription.

⁸ ‘Hir werpen se synen lycham in dat mer und de engele brochten en to lande und wart erliken begraven’. See Mänd (2009a: 362) for this transcription as well as for description of other scenes from St Victor’s life.

blessed by her heavenly Father, while in the lower register she is pictured with her mother, St Anne, and the Christ Child. St Anne enjoyed great popularity at the end of the fifteenth century, and Livonia was no exception (Nixon 2004; Kurisoo 2007: 21-23). Although the veneration of Anne certainly reflected the values of late-medieval urban middle-class families, the devotional profile of the imagery was still wider (Brandenburg 1995: 31-65). Scholars have named this iconographic theme 'the Trinity of Incarnation', exploring both its visual correspondences with the Holy Trinity and its emphasis on the matrilineal ancestry of Christ (Sheingorn 1990: 176; 1993: 71; Räsänen 2009). The image of the Incarnation Trinity thus highlights the human body, the very *materia*—that is, both maternity and materiality—that was needed for Word to become Flesh. Here, the complex devotional genealogy casts Mary as both the mother and the daughter of God, *Dei mater et filia*, as well as the spouse and the sister of Christ. This logic would have certainly been familiar to the pious who gathered before the altarpiece to adore and empathise with the Virgin, whose 'multiple and labile bodies within the celestial family,' to quote Newman, 'expressed a whole panoply of relationships to the divine and offered each in turn as a paradigm for imitation' (2003: 253). The lability of holy figures made obvious in the Niguliste altarpiece reflects, of course, the lability of the social roles of the church's parishioners. City dwellers, respected professionals, family members, they were all invited to relate the various figurations of holy bodies to their own—bodies that worked, bodies that prayed, bodies that lived.

Conclusion: the Lived Body

It is imperative to understand the place of these social bodies in the staging of the urban drama. The 'maxi-elements' of the city, and the altarpieces that they housed, were activated by and connected through the somatic presence of Reval's inhabitants who mapped the city's secular and sacred geography. While their daily activity filled its streets, the itinerant bodies coursed through these arteries between the harbour, the market square, and the city gates. Festivities in and around Reval defined and linked urban spaces through such communal activities as celebratory processions on religious and secular festivals that sometimes included dancing in the streets, or entries of the sovereigns, who walked through Reval with their retinue of high city officials, noblemen, and burghers (Mänd 2005). Corpus Christi processions held particular significance in Livonia, as they did throughout Europe (Rubin 1991). As Keith D. Lilley writes:

Such ritual bodily performances in and through the medieval urban landscape were important for generating and projecting a sense of urban identity and community, the

urban ‘body’ acting as one to honour both Christ and his saints. The performances were thus both individual and corporate, and through passing spatially in and around the city they connected the urban ‘body’ with the Body of Christ, and hence the city with the wider world. Commemoration and celebration of this kind had the ‘body’ of the city performing as a whole, as well as its individual parts, or members, the citizenry that made up the body as a whole (2009: 158).

Corpus Christi was celebrated in Reval as early as 1342, and Püha Vaimu was the first church in Reval to use a monstrance for the display of the consecrated Host, in 1381 (Mänd 2005: 163-68). Guild members and city councillors carried candles in the procession. No specific itineraries of these processions survive, but we can surmise that they involved large audiences and complex routes. We do know that during the Corpus Christi feast the monstrance was ‘carried “through the town”, [and] that it was for a certain time placed on a platform in the market place for public veneration’, lit by candles, and protected by a canopy (Mänd 2005: 167). The market square was a locus of bodily activity, including jousts, dancing, and the celebration of some Christmas and Carnival events—not to mention public hangings. Above the square towered the Town Hall, in which the orderly bodies of city councillors were warned, instructed, and entertained by elaborate representations of transgressive bodies carved on benches: Tristan and Isolde, for instance, and Aristotle and Phyllis.

By the late Middle Ages, it became common practice to map the city in terms of the human body, and to compare the structure of the body to urban spaces. Discussing Henri de Mondeville’s *Chirurgie* (1306-1320), a celebrated text written in the service of Philip the Fair, Marie-Christine Pouchelle (1990: 125-59) draws attention to the plethora of metaphors that convert the body into a built environment, into edifices, cages, cells, replete with windows and doors. The gendering of urban spaces, too, plays a role in the construction of this metaphor; as Camille (2000: 27) points out, ‘entrances and interiors are female, especially churches’. In particular, exegesis of St John’s Revelation enabled Mary’s body to be interpreted as the body of the church. The living bodies of the devout constituted and activated the body of the church and the body of the city, negotiating between their sanctioned, authoritative rhetoric, and, as Miri Rubin put it, ‘experiences broad and divergent, grounded in contact with other people, in connectedness and imagination’ (1994: 115). These were the bodies that mapped the city and constantly transformed it, changing Reval’s visual foci, transforming what is now called the Old Town into a single spatial element within the complex network of other such urban elements. That, too, is the stuff of legend.

* * *

While carrying heavy stones to her husband's grave, Kalev's wife, Linda, stumbled and dropped one of the stones on the ground. As she sat down to cry, her tears ran together and collected into a small lake, now called Ülemiste. Once a year, or so the legend goes, an old man rises from the depths of the lake and asks passersby whether the city is still being built, or whether it is completely finished. One must always answer that the town is still growing, lest the old man unlocks the gates of the lake, and its waters flood Reval and destroy its living body.



Figure 1: Workshop of Bernt Notke, *Christ as the Man of Sorrows* and *St Elisabeth of Thüringia*, first view of the Püha Vaimu altarpiece, 1483.

Püha Vaimu church, Tallinn, Estonia. Photo: Stanislav Stepáško.

By the kind permission of Gustav Piir, Church of the Holy Spirit, Tallinn.



Figure 2: Workshop of Bernt Notke, *Christ's Passion* and *St Elisabeth's vita*, second view of the Püha Vaimu altarpiece, 1483.

Püha Vaimu church, Tallinn, Estonia. Photo: Stanislav Stepaško.

By the kind permission of Gustav Piir, Church of the Holy Spirit, Tallinn.



Figure 3: Workshop of Bernt Notke, *The Miracle of the Pentecost with Saints and the Coronation of the Virgin*, third view of the Püha Vaimu altarpiece, 1483. Püha Vaimu church, Tallinn, Estonia. Photo: Stanislav Stepaško.

By the kind permission of Gustav Piir, Church of the Holy Spirit, Tallinn.



Figure 4: Attributed to the Master of the St Lucy Legend, *The Annunciation*, first view of the Altarpiece of the Virgin Mary of the Confraternity of the Black Heads, ca. 1490.

Niguliste Museum, Tallinn, Estonia. Photo: Stanislav Stepaško.
By the kind permission of Tarmo Saaret and the Niguliste Museum, Tallinn.



Figure 5: Attributed to the Master of the St Lucy Legend, *The Triple Intercession with the Virgin, Christ and John the Baptist*, second view of the Altarpiece of the Virgin Mary of the Confraternity of the Black Heads, ca. 1490.

Niguliste Museum, Tallinn, Estonia. Photo: Stanislav Stepaško.

By the kind permission of Tarmo Saaret and the Niguliste Museum, Tallinn.



Figure 6: Attributed to the Master of the St Lucy Legend, *The Virgin Enthroned with Saints*, third view of the Altarpiece of the Virgin Mary of the Confraternity of the Black Heads, ca. 1490.

Niguliste Museum, Tallinn, Estonia. Photo: Stanislav Stepaško.

By the kind permission of Tarmo Saaret and the Niguliste Museum, Tallinn.



Figure 7: Workshop of Hermen Rode, *Lives of St Nicholas of Myra and St Victor of Marseilles*, second view of the main altarpiece of the St Nicholas Church, ca. 1480.

Niguliste Museum, Tallinn, Estonia. Photo: Stanislav Stepaško.
By the kind permission of Tarmo Saaret and the Niguliste Museum, Tallinn.



Figure 8: Workshop of Hermen Rode, *Glorification of the Virgin and St Anne with the Virgin and Child with Saints*, third view of the main altarpiece of the St Nicholas Church, ca. 1480.

Niguliste Museum, Tallinn, Estonia. Photo: Stanislav Stepaško.
By the kind permission of Tarmo Saaret and the Niguliste Museum, Tallinn.

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