ATHANOR XXXVIII

FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY DEPARTMENT OF ART HISTORY

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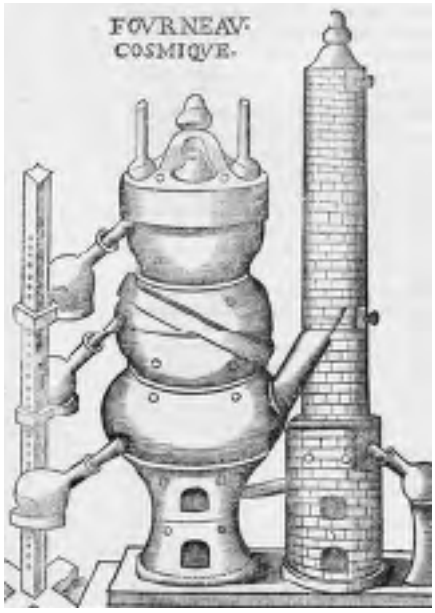

Cosmic over or Athanor from Annibal Barlet, *Le Vray Cours de Physique*, Paris, 1653.

L.C. #81-68863

Cover: Crucified Christ, ca. 1300, walrus ivory with traces of paint and gilding, 7 9/16 x 2 1/16 x 1 3/8 in., Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY, USA. Photo Credit: Metropolitan Museum of Art.

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Günther Stamm Prize for Excellence

Mia Hafer was awarded the Günther Stamm Prize for Excellence for "Indices in Ivory: Aspiring Affective Piety with a Walrus Ivory Christ" presented at the 2021 Art History Graduate Student Symposium.

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Indices in Ivory: Inspiring Affective Piety with a Walrus Ivory Christ

Mia Hafer

The *Crucified Christ* (Figure 1), now at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, captures both Christ's serene acceptance of death and the graphic reality of mortality in a way rarely seen in medieval ivory carvings. Crafted by a Parisian artisan working in either England or Cologne around 1300, the seven-inch-tall statue now stands devoid of its arms and the small crucifix to which it was originally attached.[1] Christ is depicted with his head falling slightly forward, the smooth S-curve of his body emphasizing his youthful form and artfully crossed legs. Scant remains of gold leaf on Christ's hair and beard encircle the figure's face in a heavenly light, emphasizing Christ's calm dignity which was maintained even in death. Remnants of red paint accentuate Christ's side wound and trail downward, mimicking the appearance of a trickle of dried blood. What makes this piece notable, however, is not the style in which it was carved, but the medium itself—walrus ivory. I argue that the material of the *Crucified Christ*, as manipulated by the sculptor, lends itself to affective contemplation, shaping the viewer's devotional experience. By examining how sight, light, touch, and theology shaped a viewer's perception of the work, I demonstrate how such pieces served to close the gap between the absent divine and the affective devotee.

Walrus Ivory in Context

Throughout the Middle Ages ivory was a coveted luxury material, its preciousness only increased by fluctuations in its availability. As Peter Barnet and Sarah Guérin's recent studies on elephant tusks have pointed out, the Gothic era trade in elephant ivory was far from stable. By the eighth century, Muslim conquest of critical trade routes through North Africa, such as those within the Swahili corridor, halted the movement of elephant tusks into Europe, making the medium scarce on the continent until the twelfth century.[2] Recent scholarship has linked this limited accessibility to the rise of walrus ivory, as Norse traders from the eleventh century onwards began shipping walrus tusks from Greenland to ports in England and Cologne.[3] By the late 1200s trade between Africa and Europe resumed, again allowing for the shipment of elephant tusks to northern France, as well as to the same English and German ports that continued to receive walrus goods.[4] By 1300 both types of ivory were circulating within the European market simultaneously, becoming readily available to carvers of small devotional objects like the *Crucified Christ*.

Though scholars such as Kristen A. Seaver have acknowledged the importance of walrus ivory for Viking and Scandinavian material culture, medievalists have paid minimal attention to the semiotic potential and strategic usage of the medium in the Gothic era. [5] This could be both due to the imprecision of primary sources that discuss walrus ivory, as well as a conflation of "ivory" terms in the period. Early Scandinavian sources refer to walrus ivory by the Latin word *eburneas*, a label that denotes the color ivory white, as well as the material itself. As of yet scholars have been unable to discover any words used to refer distinctly to walrus or elephant ivory in medieval Europe, raising the possibility that there was no clear linguistic distinction between the two ivory types.[6]

While there was no etymological distinction between the two ivories, the visual difference between the two tusk types suggests that medieval artisans could have recognized a variety of different ivories. Sourced from Atlantic walruses, the tusks are relatively short compared to their elephant counterparts.[7] Whereas African elephant tusks could weigh up to one hundred and fifty pounds and measure ten-feet long, the oblong teeth of a walrus extend to a maximum of forty inches with a four-inch diameter. While elephant tusks contain more carving material, the continued difficulties faced when trans-

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1 *Crucified Christ,* ca. 1300*,* Northern European, walrus ivory with traces of paint and gilding, 7 9/16 x 2 1/16 x 1 3/8 in., the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2005.274.

2 For more information on the Swahili corridor see Peter Barnet, "Gothic Sculpture in Ivory: An Introduction," in *Images in Ivory: Precious Objects of the Gothic Age,* ed. Peter Barnet, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 4–5. For information on the fall and later renewal of the ivory trade in Europe see Sarah Guerin, *Gothic Ivories: Calouste Gulbenkian Collection*, (London: Scala Arts & Heritage Publishers, 2015), 41.

3 Kirsten A. Seaver, "Desirable Teeth: The Medieval Trade in Arctic and African Ivory," in *Journal of Global History* (2009): 277.

4 Margaret Gibson, *The Liverpool Ivories: Late Antique and Medieval Ivory and Bone Carving in Liverpool Museum and the Walker Art Gallery*, (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1994), 69.

5 For more information on the medieval walrus ivory trade see Seaver, "Desirable Teeth." For an overview on older theories on the relationship between the elephant and walrus ivory trade see Else Rosedahl, "L'ivoire de morse et les colonies norroises du Groenland," *Proxima Thule: Revue d'E´ tudes Nordiques* 3, (1998): 9–48. For information on how early collecting practices may have hindered the recognition of non-French ivories and, by extension, walrus ivory objects which were considered of lesser quality by early scholars, see Nina Rowe, "Pocket Crucifixions: Jesus, Jews, and Ownership in Fourteenth-Century Ivories," *Studies in Iconography* 32 (2011): 81–120.

6 It should be noted that medieval viewers may also not have connected ivory directly back to its source animal. Medieval bestiaries that discuss elephants make no reference to ivory in relation to the animal, only addressing the tusks as a means of defense. Walruses are also absent entirely from bestiaries. Thus the division between types of ivory in the medieval mind from a natural history perspective may be far less than originally assumed. Seaver, "Desirable Teeth," 4, 274. For more information on medieval bestiaries see Christian Heck and Rémy Cordonnier, *The Grand Medieval Bestiary: Animals in Illuminated Manuscripts,* (New York: Abbeville Press, 2011).

7 Seaver, "Desirable Teeth," 274.

porting the medium between continents made walrus ivory a much more reliable import for the Gothic craftsperson.[8] Once received in Europe, both types of tusks were immediately put to use, as the same cities that acquired shipments of ivory also arose as major production centers for the material. However, due to the unreliable nature of the ivory trade in relation to other mediums, there were no workshops that specialized exclusively in ivory carving. Instead, texts such as the thirteenth century *Livre des métiers*, or Book of Trades, written by the French official Etienne Boileau, suggest that guilds were divided not by material usage, but by the objects they produced.[9] Boileau identified seven guilds permitted to work with ivory, bone, and wood, including the *ymagiers tailleurs*, or sculptors of images.[10] This flexibility in material usage suggests that by the thirteenth century both walrus and elephant tusks likely joined a collection of other non-stone carving mediums within a singular carving workshop.

From the twelfth century onward, guilds began focusing on the creation of small handheld objects, a change that coincided with shifting court and devotional culture across Europe. The luxury status of ivory made it a desirable medium for aristocratic works like mirror backs and combs, while its pristine color and subtle glow made it a popular choice for handheld devotional statuettes and small triptychs.[11] At this time, many carving workshops in places like Paris also began to sell their pieces on-site, allowing potential patrons to choose from a variety of price points and mediums.[12] While pieces carved in wood or bone may have been intended for the average medieval consumer, the cost of importing walrus tusks would have increased the price of the resulting sculptures, likely reserving such works for aristocratic or elite monastic patrons. In such displays, walrus ivory objects stood alongside similar elite objects in other materials, serving not as a substitute for elephant ivory, as often claimed by previous scholars discussing the medium, but as an alternative *option*. In a marketplace where artisans used both varieties of ivory and presented them in a singular location, the question becomes: how would a fourteenth century viewer differentiate between the two types and would this distinction have mattered to devotees? To answer this, I will first examine the affordances of walrus ivory as a medium before exploring how the material's visual impact may have increased its desirability in the age of affective piety.

Though from different faunal sources, both walrus and elephant tusks share many compositional similarities. Both ivories are composed of a layer of hard, brittle cementum on the outside of the tooth and an inner dentine center. The softer dentine layer is what makes ivory a valuable carving material, as it sheers evenly in all directions when carved. Like its elephant counterpart, walrus ivory is semi-translucent when carved; the transparency of the medium is further increased by the number of minute channels running through the tusk.[13] Both ivories acquire a pearly sheen and natural warmth when exposed to one's skin, though walrus ivory is described as slightly oilier to the touch.[14] Unlike elephant ivory, however, walrus tusks have not one but two distinct layers of dentine (Figure 2). The external layer is smooth and milky white, distinguishable from elephant tusk samples only due to its lack of the "cone-within-cone" striation pattern.[15] The second layer of dentine—which will be referred to as secondary dentine for the remainder of this paper—is variable in texture and color.[16] It is this secondary dentine that was exposed on the front of the *Crucified Christ,* granting the piece an unnerving realism and affective potential unmatched by similar works made in elephant ivory.

Understanding the Medium: Material Manipulation

The realism of the *Crucified Christ* is made possible by the traces of growth that remain evident within the ivory itself, a ghostly reminder of the living creature from which it was sourced. Composed of microscopic channels that housed neural and vascular connections for the growing tooth, the medium's secondary dentine is colored with wavering lines of brown and red pigmentation, the remnants of these lifegiving passageways.[17] It is this damasked patterning that the artisan of the *Crucified Christ* exposed to create a deathly pallor in his figure. The red streaks within the tusk's inner dentine are evident on Christ's torso and feet (Figure 3), mimicking the red of his painted side wound and hinting at the many tortures experienced by the holy man.[18] The brown tracks that creep across Christ's body seemingly mimic the sight of blood settling and

8 For information on walrus tusk size and how walrus ivory pieces can be sectioned together to create larger works see Elizabeth C. Parker and Charles T. Little, *The Cloisters Cross: Its Art and Meaning*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), 17. For information on the average size and composition of elephant tusks see Barnet, "Gothic Sculpture in Ivory, 5.

9 Elizabeth Sears, "Ivory and Ivory Workers in Medieval Paris," in *Images in Ivory: Precious Objects of the Gothic Age,* ed. Peter Barnet, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 19.

10 Sears, "Ivory and Ivory Workers," 20–22.

11 For more information on the types of ivory objects created during this time period see Paul Williamson, Glyn Davies, and James Stevenson, *Medieval Ivory Carvings: 1200-1550 : Victoria and Albert Museum*, (London: V&A Publishing, 2014).

12 Sarah Guérin, *Gothic Ivories: Calouste Gulbenkian Collection*, (London: Scala Arts & Heritage Publishers, 2015), 42. For additional evidence that ivory works were sold often "off of the rack" to patrons who visited workshops rather than just by commission see Nina Rowe, "Pocket Crucifixions," 90–94.

13 Raymond H. Lafontaine and Patricia A. Wood, "The Stabilization of Ivory against Relative Humidity Fluctuations," *Studies in Conservation* 27, no. 3 (1982): 109–111.

14 Nancy Marie Brown, *Ivory Viking: The Mystery of the Most Famous Chessmen in the World and the Woman Who Made Them,* (New York: St. Martin, 2015), 28–9.

15 Lyubov Smirnova, *Comb-Making in Medieval Novgorod (950-1450)*, (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2005), 15.

16 Lafontaine, and Wood, "The Stabilization of Ivory against Relative Humidity," 109–17.

17 Olaus J Murie, "Ecology and Biology of the Pacific Walrus" in *Natural History of the King Rail,* ed. Brooke, Meanley, (Washington: Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, 1969), 73–4.

18 There is a mixture of painted red streaks on the *Crucified Christ* along with red coloration within the material itself. A close examination of the figure allows one to identify paint due to its raised texture. Other discoloration, however, appears to be within the material itself, a marker of walrus ivory most evident is tusks sourced from younger animals.

congealing in the veins of the lifeless figure.[19] Stretching across his bare body and legs, this darkened layer contrasts with the white of Christ's clothing and face (Figure 4), which are carved out of the tusk's creamy primary dentine. A side view of the *Crucified Christ* (Figure 5) heightens the emotional impact of this material shift, showing a clear division between the two dentines. The abrupt transition between these two portions of the tusk captures Christ in a liminal space, creating the impression that, in an instant, time could spring forward to envelope his entire form in either the divine glow of life and resurrection or the sallowness of his mortal demise. While perhaps the most stunning example, the *Crucified Christ* is not the only piece that used the expressive potential of walrus ivory's inner dentine. The carver of the *Oslo Corpus* (Figure 6), now in the collection of the Oslo Kunstindustrimuseet, also revealed the secondary dentine layer on Christ's legs and torso, while carving his face out of the medium's pristine outer surface.[20] Though the *Oslo Corpus* is the only direct comparanda for the *Crucified Christ,* numerous other medieval objects hint at a larger awareness of walrus ivory's artistic possibilities. The artisan of the Cleveland Museum of Art's *Plaques from a Portable Altar: Christ and the Apostles* (Figures 7 and 8) carved into the tusk's variegated interior for the background of each panel, creating the impression that the Apostles are seated against a rich marble wall. The increased transparency of the secondary dentine surrounding Christ enthroned on the center plaque likewise creates the sense of a pulsing, heavenly glow around Christ. The carver's manipulation of walrus ivory in these instances suggests that the exposed inner dentine on the *Crucified Christ* was not incidental. A closer examination of the work shows the level of precision and familiarity with the material that was required to create such a powerful devotional work.

Unlike elephant tusks, which had to be split vertically along their inner nerve channel before being divided into smaller pieces (Figure 9), walrus tusks could be cut into horizontal sections that were carved in the round—a practice that presented a new challenge for those working with the medium. [21] The secondary dentine within walrus tusks can vary wildly depending on the material's source animal, as the inner layer is gradually replaced by primary dentine as a walrus ages. Rather than running uniformly along the length of the tooth, secondary dentine can at times be more heavily concentrated on one side and can end abruptly in samples taken from adult animals.[22] To create the *Crucified Christ* the carver in question would have not only needed to be aware of this variability, but also develop a strategy for estimating the inner dentine's growth. A side view of the *Crucified Christ* demonstrates that the craftsperson positioned their carving to follow the slight curve of the tusk. The feet of the figure appear to be crafted out of the portion closest to the tusk's distal end where the layer of secondary dentine was the thinnest, as the characteristic discoloration only appears on the top of Christ's feet. The artisan likely then removed the exterior dentine on the portion allotted for Christ's chest, using the damasked material on both the figure's torso and feet to estimate the dentine's overall diagonal growth, as indicated by the dotted green lines in Figure 10. This technique would have allowed the carver to ensure that both the clothing and face of Christ projected outward enough from the tusk's center so as to be composed only of the tooth's pristine primary dentine.

The precision of such a task is evident when viewing the *Crucified Christ* from the back (Figure 11), which shows a shift in color that indicates that most of Christ's hair was carved out of the secondary dentine. The fact that the majority of Christ's head appears to be composed of this layer suggests that the craftsperson was within millimeters of exposing the inner dentine on Christ's face as well. Though paint and gilding was added to the surface of the *Crucified Christ* the craftsperson made no attempt to hide or obscure the natural patterning of the dentine itself. Rather, the trickle of red paint on the figure's side and clothing is used to emphasize the small indent representing Christ's side wound, the addition serving to simultaneously draw attention to both the blood exiting Christ's body and the once life-sustaining substance that has begun to clot beneath the figure's skin. The gilding on the work is likewise scantily used, applied only to the edges of Christ's garment and to his hair and crown, the glittering material encircling the pristine white of the work's outer dentine. The skill required for carving such a piece and the sensitivity paid to the natural characteristics of the medium implies that it was likely one of many walrus ivory objects created within the workshop in question. Though patrons could have purchased a similar elephant ivory piece, the choice to undertake such a complex carving process to create the *Crucified Christ* speaks to the desirability of such figures in the age of affective piety.

Materiality and Meaning in Medieval Objects

To understand the impact of the *Crucified Christ* on affective devotees, contemporary scholars must not only examine the composition of walrus tusks but also the medium's larger function and symbolic meaning. Medieval viewers often saw matter itself and the object it made up as inherently alive, capable of asserting its agency on the world around it.[23] In the medieval mind a work's medium was perceived as instilling the object with a sense of life, one which impacted both the image and its viewers. Following the twelfth century's explosion of interest in ancient philosophy and the natural world, medieval people were increasingly exposed to sources like lapidaries, world encyclopedias, and the religious texts or sermons that incorporated their teaching. This instilled viewers with an understanding of the inherent devotional properties

19 For more information on the interior makeup and growth patterns of walrus tusks see Murie, "Ecology and Biology," 73–95.

20 I am currently unaware of any direct literature on this piece, though it is included as a comparison objects in Williamson, Davies, and Stevenson, *Medieval Ivory Carvings*.

21 For more information on the preparation of elephant tusks see Guérin, *Gothic Ivories*, 41.

22 Murie, "Ecology and Biology," 74, 87–9.

23 Henning Laugerud, Salvador Ryan, and Laura Katrine Skinnebach, "Intro," in *The Materiality of Devotion in Late Medieval Europe,* eds. Henning Laugerud, Salvador Ryan, and Laura Katrine Skinnebach, (Portland: Four Courts Press, 2016), 3.

attributed to specific mediums by contemporary scholars and theologians, further encouraging worshippers to reflect more deeply on the makeup of an object and its greater spiritual significance.[24] Thus, the base elements of a work could be understood as stimulating, and at times simulating, a larger conversation about the nature of the world and its connection to divinity.

Though medieval walrus ivory has received little scholarly attention, an investigation of other organic materials can help shed light on the possible significance of the material to an affective devotee. Formerly living mediums, such as ivory, wood, and parchment, could instill new vitality into representations of Christ, a sense of being that took on different meanings based on the inherent qualities of the substance used.[25] Materials like wood and parchment continuously reasserted their connection to life, demanding that artisans recognize both the will of the medium and the shared similarities between the resulting work and the viewers themselves. An examination of the materiality and semiotics of wood and parchment, as well as what is assumed to be elephant ivory, can better ground the reception of walrus tusks by affective devotees of the time.

To recognize the significance of walrus ivory in the age of affective devotion, it is critical to understand the religious trend itself. Affective piety was a twelfth century movement that focused on creating intensely personal moments between the divine and the devout, interactions often facilitated by objects and their overt materiality. Theologians at the time encouraged placing oneself into the narrative of the Passion in order to better identify with Christ's sacrifice. To facilitate such mental reimagining, craftspeople began focusing on creating isolated representations of Christ on the cross. These works encouraged viewers to reflect upon Christ's suffering and the humanity that made his death possible.[26] By gazing upon an image of Christ's crucified body and placing oneself within the holy event, the pious forged a highly emotional connection to their redeemer. Such images not only allowed for an increased sense of intimacy with the divine, but also emphasized Christ's bodily nature. His position as savior hinged upon his earthly body, which was not only sacrificed for humanity, but also served as a symbol that God truly understood human temptation and suffering. For many, this union with the heavenly could be achieved by meditating upon physical works.[27]

The materials of such devotional objects often played a critical role in viewers' meditative experience. Medieval artisans often intentionally asserted the materiality of their creations, making the medium of a work fundamental to devotees perception of the piece overall. Medieval theologians regularly described base materials as being imbued with Christological significance, each substance reflecting the divine light of creation through its inherent qualities. Artisans often crafted devotional objects out of numerous precious mediums. Their presence not only added a visual lavishness to the works but created a layering of deep semiotic meaning on a single object.[28] While precious metals and stones could convey complex theological messages to the pious, organic materials like wood, parchment, and ivory instilled images with a seemingly continued life with which viewers could identify.

Wood was considered living long after the tree it originated from was felled. Isidore of Seville described wood as "fertile and capable of becoming" and believed that it generated living worms.[29] In order to work with the medium, artisans had to adjust their approach based on the species of tree in question.[30] As Michael Baxandall points out in his discussion of limewood sculptures, craftspeople also often responded to the "lines of disposition and experience" on a trunk, incorporating elements like knots and growth patterns into their completed works.[31] This practice becomes evident when examining the face of St. Jerome from the piece *St. Augustine (or St. Ambrose) and St. Jerome,* where the carver has used the natural growth rings of the wood to emphasize both the suppleness of Jerome's cheeks and the deep wrinkles of his brow (Figure 12). Such familiarity also ensured that workers remained aware of the continuously shifting nature of their medium. Constantly changing positions in response to humidity changes, wooden pieces seemed to have a secret life all their own, rendered motionless only under the human gaze.

Like wood, parchment was rich with somatic potential due to the continued life attributed to the medium. Created from the skin of sheep or calves, parchment often retained visible remnants of the living beings it once enveloped. For theologians who saw Christ as the "Word made flesh" (John 1:14), the inscription of the word of God onto physical skin was particularly powerful. This led to an explosion of sermons and theological treaties that equated Christ's body to a book, likening his skin to parchment and the wounds he received during the Passion to rubricated text on the page's surface.[32] Christ's flesh was likewise described as a legal charter between divin-

24 Caroline Walker Bynum, *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe*, (New York: Zone Books, 2011), 18.

25 Herbert L. Kessler, *Seeing Medieval Art*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 20.

26 Salvador Ryan, "Christ the Wounded Lover and Affective Piety in Late Medieval Ireland and Beyond," in *The Materiality of Devotion in Late Medieval Europe,* eds. Henning Laugerud, Salvador Ryan, and Laura Katrine Skinnebach, (Portland: Four Courts Press, 2016), 71. For more information on affective piety see Sarah McNamer, *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

27 Laura Katrine Skinnebach, "Transfiguration: Change and Comprehension in Late Medieval Devotional Perception," in *The Materiality of Devotion in Late Medieval Europe,* eds. Henning Laugerud, Salvador Ryan, and Laura Katrine Skinnebach, (Portland: Four Courts Press, 2016), 94–5.

28 Kessler, *Seeing Medieval Art*, 10.

29 Isidore of Seville, *Isidori Hispalensis episcopi Etymologiorum sive originum libri*, XX, ed. W. M. Lindsay, Oxford, 1911, vol. 2, 321-3, book 19, section 19.3–6.

30 For more information on the nature of different woods and the requirements for carving see Nicholas Penny, "The Structure and Decoration of Larger Wooden Sculpture" and "Varieties of Smaller Wooden Sculpture," in *The Materials of Sculpture,* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 123–152.

31 Michael Baxandall, *The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany,* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 32–33.

32 Marlene Villalobos Hennessy, "The Social Life of a Manuscript Metaphor," in *The Social Life of Illumination: Manuscripts, Images, and Communities in the Late Middle Ages,* eds. Joyce Coleman, Mark Cruse, and Kathryn A. Smith, (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), 17.

ity and humanity, one signed with his blood.[33] His suffering on the cross was equated with the preparation of parchment, which was stretched on a wooden frame, burnished, and then left under the hot sun for days during production.[34] Such analogies of the book as flesh were only heightened as a manuscript was used. The buildup of oils and grime from the user's hand emphasized pores and vein tracks of the former skin; a marker of use clearly seen on examples like *The Tower of Babel* page from a manuscript from the collection of the British Library (Figure 13).[35] Upon encountering such traces viewers were made increasingly aware of the similarities between themselves and the material, the phantom remnants of life encountered on their very own flesh.

Medieval scholars also believed that ivory contained a variety of symbolic meanings. Pliny the Elder believed ivory had purifying properties, a nature reflected in the tusk's pure white color and his claim that it could be used to remove facial blemishes.[36] The twelfth century scholar Guibert of Nogent expanded upon this belief, using ivory to connect Christ to his precursor in the Old Testament, Solomon, stating: "The wisdom of God the Father . . . that is Solomon, made for himself a throne of ivory, that is the seat in the Virgin, because [Christ] would not be placed in anything unchaste."[37] The lack of distinction between elephant and walrus tusks at the time raises the possibility that such meaning was given to walrus ivory as well. In this context the multivalent meaning of the *Crucified Christ* would have been heightened, possibly further surpassing that of its elephant counterpart as the symbolism associated with ivory was combined with a worshipper's reaction to both Christ's form and the associations with real death that walrus ivory evoked.

For viewers of the *Crucified Christ*, the experience of such an object was constructed both by the meaning inherent in the material and devotees' experience when encountering the work. Though the original setting for the piece has been lost, the statue was likely attached to either a standing or hanging cross removed from the larger Passion narrative. If conceived as a singular figure, the *Crucified Christ* would have stood without the mourners and torturers who were with him in his last moments, their presence indicated only by the wounds that adorn his body. As viewers kneeled in prayer before the work, likely in a private chapel or home prayer niche, they themselves replaced the grieving Virgin Mary and Saint John, reenacting the anguish of those who witnessed Christ's passing. During such an act of meditation, affective devotees were able to not only reimagine the larger story of Christ's death, but re-experience the torment, pain, and deep sense of loss that accompanied Christ's sacrifice.

This reimagining of the Passion was likely heightened by the realistic depiction of death created through the secondary dentine within the piece, a realism that may have drawn upon viewers' own experience with mortality. At a time when individuals often died in their homes surrounded by family, and where the bodies of executed criminals were left to rot in public, it is likely that a medieval Christian would have been aware of the impact of death on the body.[38] Stirred by the sight of the discolored *Crucified Christ,* such memories would trigger the same sense of horror—and perhaps even spectacle—felt by those who witnessed Christ's crucifixion. It likewise could call to mind an affective devotee's own feelings of sadness and loss following a loved one's demise, allowing them to identify both with the suffering of Christ during the Passion and the grief felt by those left behind. This mimetic connection to the narrative was further heightened by the theological discourse surrounding the concept of sight and light, as well as a viewer's physical interaction with the *Crucified Christ*.

Sight, Light, and Envisioning the Divine through Walrus Ivory

Rather than serving as a distraction during meditation, physical images were believed to be fundamental to devotees' affective reimagining of the Passion, serving to turn viewers' minds towards thoughts of God while providing clues as to the larger events they were envisioning.[39] Sermons of the time were filled with the language of sight, encouraging devotees to "see" or "behold" Christ's final moments as if they took place before their eyes.[40] Though such wording implies an active role on the part of worshippers, by the 1300s new treaties of sight cast the object, rather than the onlooker, as the active force within such an interaction.

A wave of translations in the twelfth century introduced medieval theologians to the classical writings of Aristotle and his model of intromission laid out in his work *Parva Naturalia*. The rediscovered Aristotelian theory claimed that objects released "species" into the air that then impressed themselves upon the eyes' glacial humors.[41] As Suzannah Biernoff states, this belief presents the eye not as an organ that obtains images, but one that instead becomes the visible object whose impression it receives.[42] Such images were believed to move through the five cells of the brain, including the *cogitativa* used for imagination, before finally impressing themselves upon dev-

33 Siegfried Wenzel, ed. and trans., *Fasciculus Morum: A Fourteenth Century Preacher's Handbook*, (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1989), 213.

34 Hennessy, "Social Life," 18.

35 Sarah Kay, *Animal Skins and the Reading of the Self in Medieval Latin and French Bestiaries*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 3.

36 Pliny the Elder, *Natural History,* 28.24, eds. John Bostock and H.T. Riley, (London: Taylor and Francis, 1855).

37 Guibert of Nogent, *Liber de Laude Sanctae mariae*, Caput III, in *PL*, vol. 156, col. 542A. Cited in Sarah Guérin, "Meaningful Spectacles: Gothic Ivories Staging the Divine," in *Art Bulletin,* 95, 1, (March 2013): 62.

38 For more information on how familiar medieval viewers may have been with death see Paul Binski, *Medieval Death: Ritual and Representation,* (London: British Museum Press, 2001).

39 Michael Camille, *Gothic Art: Glorious Visions*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996), 22.

40 For a discussion of this linguistic trend see Sarah McNamer, "The Genealogy of a Genera," in *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 56—86.

41 Camille, *Gothic Art*, 23. For more on medieval theories of vision see David C. Lindberg, *Theories of Vision from Al-Kindi to Kepler*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976.

42 Suzannah Biernoff, *Sight and Embodiment in the Middle Ages,* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 73.

otees' *vis memorativa*, or their memory storehouse.[43] When viewed in light of such beliefs, the *Crucified Christ* can be understood as possessing agency in its own right, both physically engaging with, and changing, its pious viewers. As the image of the *Crucified Christ* impressed itself upon worshippers' eyes the Passion narrative was further enlivened, this time not by the agency of the object but by devotees' reimagining of the scene. As they attempted to insert themselves within the larger story, viewers drew from their *vis memorativa* to recreate the story both based on their knowledge of the Passion and their recollection of personal life events. This recreation, however, is shaped not only by one's memories but by the indices within the *Crucified Christ* itself, markers which draw upon both Christ's final moments and the tortures he endured before his death.

A closer look at the figure reveals signs of torment that go far beyond his painted side wound. The discoloration within the secondary dentine beneath Christ's chin resembles a line of darkened bruises, drawing viewers' minds towards thoughts of Christ's flagellation and the pain that accompanied it. The glossy sheen of the walrus ivory evokes the sense of a fresh layer of sweat forming on Christ's weakened body as he baked under the hot sun, begging his tormentors for a drink only to be offered gal and vinegar. The figure's red flecked and darkened feet allude to the dusty road Christ trekked along barefoot as he carried the cross to Golgotha, as well as the blood that gushed forth as his feet were nailed to the wood of the cross. Such indices visually recreate the actions inflicted upon Christ's body, encouraging viewers to identify with the anguished human presented before them. As light interacts with such a piece, however, both the divine and human natures of Christ become equally evident for onlookers.

For medieval viewers light not only illuminated the devotional objects before them, but it also served to symbolically connect the devout to the divine. The Gothic era embraced light as the visible manifestation of God, inspired both by Christ's title as "light of the world" and by theologians, such as Robert Grosseteste, who argued that all light served as a model for acquiring holy knowledge and moral truths.[44] Grosseteste acknowledged, however, that there were limitations to such understanding as earlier laid out by Augustine in his treaties on the hierarchy of vision *De Genesi ad litteram*, as light only reveals what the corporeal eye is capable of capturing, that of the corporeal world.[45] This constant struggle between the visible and the unseen, between divine knowledge and the physical form, is only heightened by the material nature of the *Crucified Christ* and the intimate devotional environment where it was placed.

Positioned on a small private altar, the *Crucified Christ* would have been lit largely by the use of flickering candlelight. As pointed out by Bissera Pentcheva, the movement of a viewer or any air currents within an interior space would have caused a candle's flame to oscillate, casting constantly shifting shadows onto the works such as the *Crucified Christ.*[46] As the numerous minute channels within the semi-translucent ivory refracted the light moving through the object, it would have created the impression of a heavenly glow emanating from the figure itself.[47] When combined with the instability of candle light, however, this creates not a sustained glow but a flickering of life and presence. Continuously shifting from one moment to the next, the ever-changing nature of candlelight creates the impression that Christ himself is moving, seemingly shifting his head or taking a breath in the brief moments between the flaring of the flame at its highest and the dimming that directly follows.

The play of light on the *Crucified Christ* not only instills the piece with a sense of life, it likewise serves to underscore the figure's humanity. The shadows that fall across such works during a candle's dimming further darken the discoloration within the ivory as the glow of the material fades with the fleeting light.[48] It is in such instances that the object and narrative are joined in viewers' minds; the tracks of clotted veins seemingly spreading across Christ's body as it shifts from the radiance of the living divine to the pallor of a lifeless cadaver. This constant move between light and dark, life and death, emphasizes the two pivotal moments within Christian doctrine: the moment Christ is proven to be truly human and the instant he is revealed to be one with God.

When viewed in light of Grosseteste's treaties on sight and divinity, the duel nature captured by the *Crucified Christ* is further highlighted. Fascinated with the perfection of the holy body, Grosseteste argued in his work *De dotibus* that there were four elements that separated the divine form from the corporeal: clarity (*claritas*), subtlety or elusiveness (*subtilitas*), agility (*agilitas*), and impassibility (*impassibilitas*). Each category was seen as contrasting what Grosseteste dubbed the "possibility, darkness or obscurity, slowness and gross materiality" of the human body.[49] Viewed in the relation to these categories, the *Crucified Christ* can be understood as visually bridging the gap between the corporeal and the spiritual, inspiring deeper affective meditation on the body and Christ's role in the Trinity.

Each of Grosseteste's categories is based on an act he deemed to be impossible for the physical body. He defined *claritas* as the luminousness and transparency of the divine, the holy light which such forms project. The glow of light passing through the walrus ivory of the *Crucified Christ* encircles the piece with a radiant shine that appears more celestial than human, allowing the work to meet the definition of *claritas*. Grosseteste's second category, *subtilitas*, deals not with

43 Camille, *Gothic Art,* 23.

44 Augustine of Hippo, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, trans. and ed. John Hammond Taylor, (New York: Newman Press, 1982).

45 Biernoff, *Sight and Embodiment,* 67—8.

46 Bissera V. Pentcheva, "The Performative Icon," *Art Bulletin,* 88, no. 4 (Dec., 2006): 631. For more information on how the use of incense may have further heightened the sensorial experience of medieval devotion see Susan A. Harvey, "St. Ephrem on the Scent of Salvation," *Journal of Theological Studies,* 48, no. 1 (1998): 109—28.

47 Murie, "Ecology and Biology," 89.

48 Kessler, *Seeing Medieval Art,* 175—6.

49 Robert Grosseteste, *De dotibus*, 92–3, 102–9. Reproduced within Servus Gieben, "Robert Grosseteste and the Immaculate Conception: With the Text of the Sermon Tota Pulchra Es," in *Collectanea franciscana,* xxviii (1958): 221–7.

light but with form itself, as it speaks to the divine's ability to escape their gross corporeal form.[50] As the *Crucified Christ* shines with the light moving through its seemingly solid-state, the very boundaries of the work become blurred, as if the divide between the work and the holiness it represents is fading from sight. This play on light could be interpreted as almost a "decorporealization" of sorts, one in which Christ's physical figure appears moments away from transcending the earthly realm.

Grosseteste defines his third category, *agilitas,* as the ability to exist between states, one that the *Crucified Christ* inherently embodies through its materiality. The sculptor's manipulation of the walrus ivory medium captures Christ in a liminal space, suspending him between life and death, continuously re-enlivened by candlelight only to then fade along with the candle's flame. Yet the final category of the glorified divine soul, *impassibilitas*, is one that the *Crucified Christ* cannot quite reach. *Impassibilitas*, considered by Grosseteste to be the most noble condition, refers to a state of being free from the burdens of the body, a superiority of the spiritual over the material.[51] For those reflecting upon Christ's lifeless form, this final category is not clearly met; as viewers examine the hints of life and resurrection captured by Christ's pristine, unblemished face and the luminosity of the work, Christ's freedom from the corporeal is called into question. Rather than a true image of the divine body, the *Crucified Christ* is a being in flux, rendered both human and supernatural. The work's inability to overcome its overt physicality, its *thingness,* further draws the object back into the worldly realm as viewers touch the piece in an attempt to close the distance between themselves and their absent savior. It is Christ's dual role as both human and divine that devotees were encouraged to meditate upon during their affective devotion. In this sense the *Crucified Christ* performs what Alfred Gell saw as the duty of an art object, locating Christ's agency as ultimately both human and supernatural.[52]

Touching the Divine: Understanding Tactile Interaction and the Crucified Christ

The flourishing of personal devotional objects that coincided with the rise of affective piety not only led to an increased emphasis on the act of viewing a work but also on tactile engagement with such pieces as well. Touch was of particular importance to Christians who maintained that God had become a man and had lived on earth, where he was within the physical realm.[53] The handheld nature of the *Crucified Christ* likely encouraged such viewers to physically engage with the work, as did the fact that the sculpture was carved entirely in the round. The consistent level of detailed craftsmanship even on the piece's back serves to further heighten the realism of the object and thus the affective reimagining it encouraged. By physically engaging with the object devotees could imagine touching the Son of God himself, momentarily compressing the gap between themselves and Christ.

Though the walrus ivory *Crucified Christ* does not evoke the softness and give of the human body, the physicality of the material still has a substantial impact on the devotional experience. To understand the importance of touch in regards to affective piety, scholars must examine the object in question as far more than just a placeholder for a distant divinity, but as a work capable of spiritually acting upon its beholder.[54] Through touch viewers not only momentarily bridged the physical gap between themselves and God, they likewise compressed the time that separated them from Christ's lifetime. As devotees placed their hands upon the cold, hard body of the lifeless Christ, they symbolically took the place of Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus who removed Christ from the cross. As worshipers touched the ivory, however, the high collagen content within the medium slowly diffused the heat from the viewers' hands, the warmth spreading throughout the entirety of the medium and giving the impression of a life regained. This temperature change, combined with the continued glow of the figure, hints at the narrative still to come, Christ's Resurrection left unwitnessed by human eyes.

Yet, while physically interacting with the *Crucified Christ* allowed viewers to imagine themselves within the larger Crucifixion scene, this act likewise served to reinforce the very time and space that devotees momentarily surpassed. As devotees touched the object it exerted pressure back, reminding them both of their own bodily state that separates them from divinity and the work's status as a placeholder for the absent Christ.[55] As Michael Yonan argues, to recognize the thingness of an object is to also admit "that it can never entirely be absorbed into one's consciousness…it remains forever external, always at odds and foreign, and insistently beyond the realm of pure comprehension."[56] Thus the *Crucified Christ's* insistent materiality reasserts the need for prayer and devotion on the part of viewers, emphasizing that only through meditation upon such pieces and the God they represent can the pious better understand the splendor and mystery of the divine.

Conclusion

Through their manipulation of the medium of walrus ivory, the sculptor of the *Crucified Christ* grants the work the ability to spark the imagination and "recreate the experience of deeply felt moments."[57] Though stylistically similar to many

50 Biernoff, *Sight and Embodiment,* 37–8.

51 Joseph Goering, "The *De Dotibus* of Robert Grosseteste*," Medieval Studies,* 44 (1982): 98; Biernoff, *Sight and Embodiment,* 37—8. For more information on Grosseteste's theological treaties see Harrison Thomson, *The Writings of Robert Grosseteste, Bishop of Lincoln, 1235-1253,* (Cambridge, 1940, repr. 1971).

52 Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory*, (New York: Clarendon Press, 1998), 18.

53 Kessler, *Seeing Medieval Art,* 70.

54 Elina Gertsman, "Matter Matters," in *Feeling Things: Objects and Emotions Throughout History*, eds. Stephanie Downes, Sally Holloway, and Sarah Randalls, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 29.

55 Susan Stewart, "From the Museum of Touch," in *Material Memories,* eds. Marius Kwint, Christopher Breward, and Jeremy Aynsley, (Oxford: Berg, 1999), 31.

56 Michael Yonan, "Toward a Fusion of Art History and Material Culture Studies," *West 86th,* 18, no. 2 (2011): 11.

57 Jules David Prown, "The Truth of Material Culture," in *American Artifacts: Essays in Material Culture*, eds. Jules David Prown and Kenneth Haltman (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2000), 6.

works made of elephant tusk, the use of walrus ivory instills the piece with a powerful agency, one that encourages a reciprocal relationship between observer and object that, in many ways, surpasses that of its elephant counterparts. Through the indices within the ivory—the darkened secondary dentine made visible by the carver's skill—the piece is able to reshape viewers' devotional experiences, one constantly reimagined as each new hint of the Passion narrative is discovered and each past memory evoked. As worshippers explore both the hints of death and promise of revival on the *Crucified Christ's* surface, they are encouraged to reflect not only upon Christ's loss and Resurrection but also their own mortality and the ultimate goal of their prayers as well. By meditating upon the former markers of life evident within the walrus ivory and their own experiences of suffering, loss, and ultimate joy, the pious were brought one step closer to both understanding their savior and reaching him in the afterlife.

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Figure 1. (*facing page*) *Crucified Christ*, Northern European, ca. 1300, walrus ivory with traces of paint and gilding dimensions: 7 9/16 x 2 1/16 x 1 3/8 in., Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2005.274.

Figure 2. (*above)* Detail of the inner layers of elephant and walrus ivory. Left: Elephant dentine from a cross section of a gaming piece. Right: Walrus ivory tusk cross section preserving a thin outer layer of cementum, a uniform layer of dense primary dentine, and an inner layer of secondary dentine. Right: From the bottom of *Game Piece with Hercules Throwing Diomedes to His Man-Eating Horses*, German, ca. 1150, elephant ivory, diam. 2 3/4 x 13/16 in., Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 16.106. Left: Thomas Kenneth Penniman, *Pictures of Ivory and Other Animal Teeth, Bone and Antler, with a Brief Commentary on their use in Identification*, (Oxford: University of Oxford, Pitt Rivers Museum, 1952).

Figure 3. (*above left*) Detail of the torso of the *Crucified Christ*, Northern European, ca. 1300, walrus ivory with traces of paint and gilding, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2005.274.

Figure 4. (*below left*) Detail of the face of the *Crucified Christ*, Northern European, ca. 1300, walrus ivory with traces of paint and gilding, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2005.274.

Figure 5. (*right*) Detail of a side view of the *Crucified Christ*, Northern European, ca. 1300, walrus ivory with traces of paint and gilding, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2005.274.

Figure 6. *Oslo Corpus*, c. 1200, walrus ivory, Nasjonalmuseet, Oslo, OK-10314.

Figure 7. (*above*) Detail of two Apostles from the *Plaque from a Portable Altar: Christ and the Apostles*, Germany, 1050-1100, walrus ivory, Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, 1922.307.

Figure 8. (*below*) Detail of Christ in a Mandorla, from the *Plaque from a Portable Altar: Christ and the Apostles*, Germany, 1050-1100, walrus ivory, Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, 1922.307.

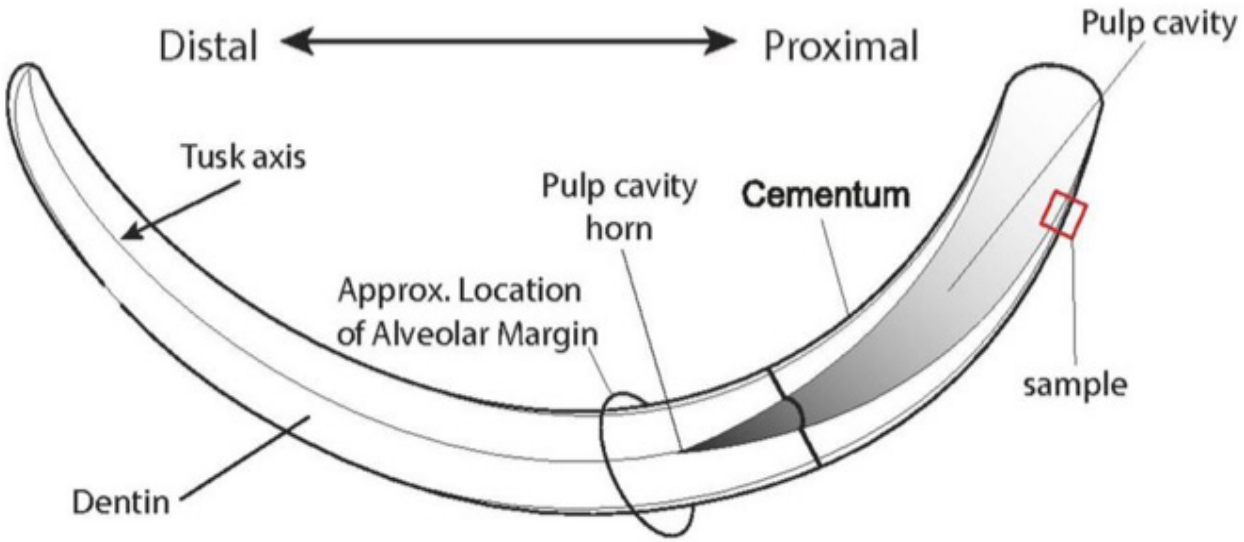

Figure 9. (above) Diagram of the interior structure of an elephant tusk. The pulp cavity of the tusk is considered to be uncarvable due to its soft nature. The line on the tusk's axis indicates where the nerve within the tusk runs, and also where the craftsmen would split the tooth in preparation for carving. Like the pulp cavity, the material surrounding this nerve channel must likewise be removed due to its soft nature. Credit to the National Academy of Sciences, Published within Cerling, Thure E., Janet E. Barnette, Lesley A. Chesson, Iain Douglas-Hamilton, Kathleen S. Gobush, Kevin T. Uno, Samuel K. Wasser, and Xiaomei Xu. 2016. "Radiocarbon dating of seized ivory confirms rapid decline in African elephant populations and provides insight into illegal trade". *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*. 113 (47): 13330-13335.

Figure 10. (*above left*) Detail of the approximate distribution of the secondary dentine within the *Crucified Christ*, Northern European, ca. 1300, walrus ivory with traces of paint and gilding, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2005.274.

Figure 11. (*below left*) Detail of the shift between primary and secondary dentine within the hair of the *Crucified Christ,* Northern European, ca. 1300, walrus ivory with traces of paint and gilding, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2005.274.

Figure 12. (*right*) Detail of the face of St. Jerome from *St. Augustine (or St. Ambrose) and St. Jerome*, German, early 16th century, oak, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 16.32.225.

Figure 13. Signs of usage on the flesh side of the *The Tower of Babel*, British Library, London, Il Tesoro: Yates Thompson MS 28, f. 51r.