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Votive offerings at selected Catholic pilgrimage sites: Theoretical reflection and analysis of extant examples

Abstract

The aim of my thesis is to analyse votive offerings at Catholic Marian pilgrimage sites mainly from the early modern period. Firstly I discuss Marian images at pilgrimage sites to show who were the votive offering brought to and to describe a broader context of their placement. The thesis is then focused on analysis of textual evidence from the 17th century relating to the Czech pilgrimage site Svatá Hora and of extant objects mainly from Bavaria. Based on these sources the most common types of votive offerings seem to be painted pictures, models of body parts, statues and figures, candles and jewelry, other objects, however, occur as well. The votive offerings were mostly donated to express gratitude for a miracle. Therefore, the miracle process is also shortly discussed in my thesis. Votive offerings did not, however, only show the gratitude of a devotee but it seems that their promise was needed for Virgin Mary to perform a miracle. My analysis suggests that very important aspects of votive offerings were their performative character and the power to create and maintain relationships with Virgin Mary and other pilgrims.