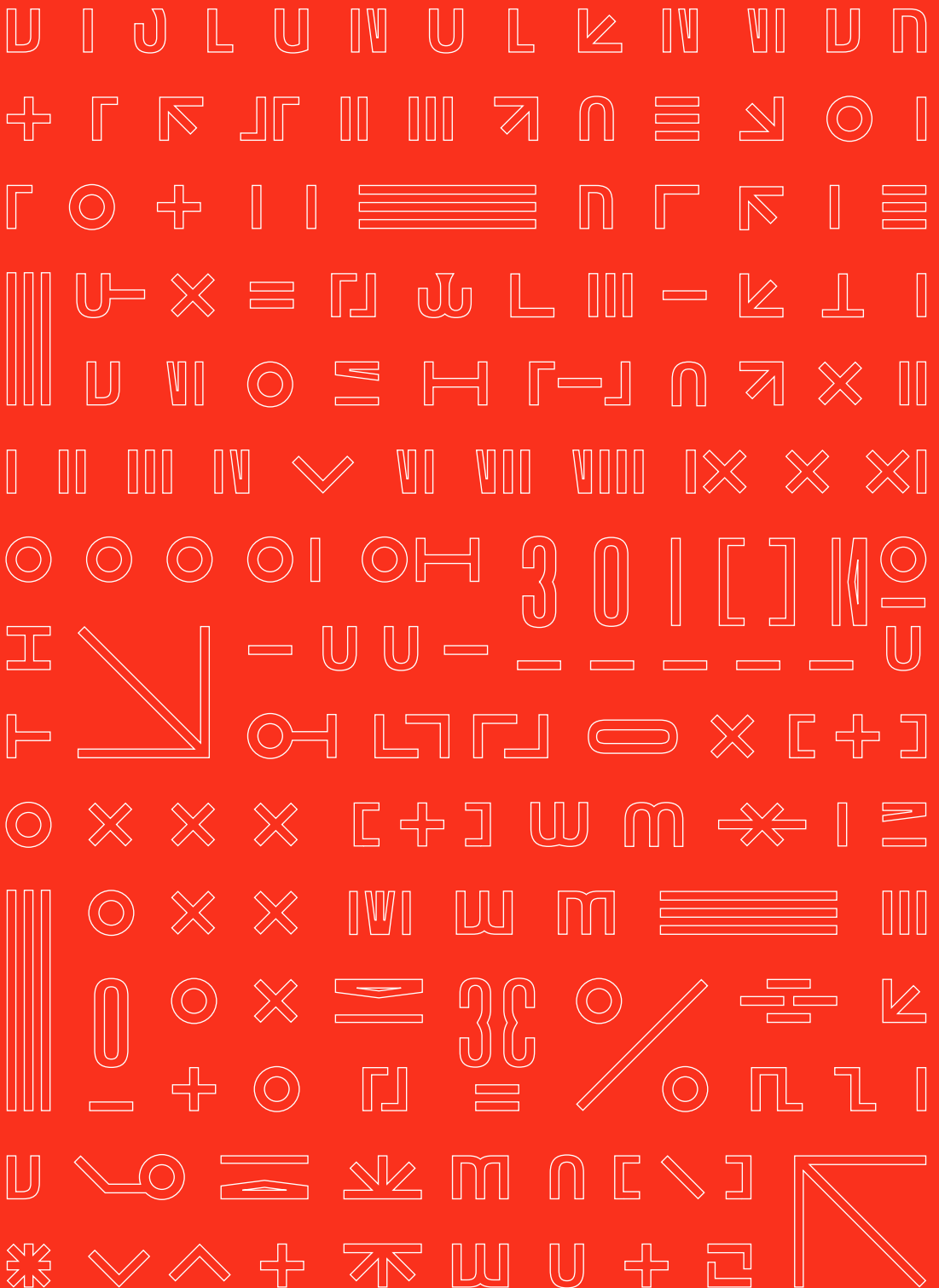
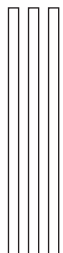
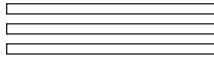


D I C E C N O

VI/02

journal of design culture  
\_S/D: Sign and Design





# Disegno

JOURNAL OF DESIGN CULTURE

Double-blind peer-reviewed, open access scholarly journal

**Editorial Board:** VICTOR MARGOLIN, PROFESSOR EMERITUS: UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS (1941–2019)

Roy Brand, Associate Professor: Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design, Jerusalem

Loredana Di Lucchio, Professor: Sapienza University of Rome

Jessica Hemmings, Professor: University of Gothenburg

Lorenzo Imbesi, Professor: Sapienza University of Rome

Ágnes Kapitány, Professor Emerita: MOME Budapest

Gábor Kapitány, Honorary Professor: MOME Budapest

Viktor Malakuczi, Research Fellow: Sapienza University of Rome

György Endre Szőnyi, Professor: University of Szeged; Visiting Professor: CEU

**Editors:** Zsolt Gyenge, Olivér Horváth (Managing Editor), Szilvia Maróthy, Márton Szentpéteri, Péter Wunderlich (Project Manager). Founding Editor: Heni Fiáth

**Graphic Design:** Borka Skrapits

**Copy Editing:** William Potter

## Aims and Scope

Disegno publishes original research papers, essays, and reviews on all aspects of design cultures. We understand the notion of design culture as resolutely broad: our aim is to freely discuss the designed environment as mutually intertwined strands of sociocultural products, practices, and discourses. This attitude traverses the disciplinary boundaries between art, design, and visual culture and is therefore open to all themes related to sociocultural creativity and innovation. Our post-disciplinary endeavour welcomes intellectual contributions from all members of different design cultures. Besides providing a lively platform for debating issues of design culture, our specific aim is to consolidate and enhance the emerging field of design culture studies in the Central European academia by providing criticism of fundamental biases and misleading cultural imprinting with respect to the field of design.

All research papers published in Disegno undergo a rigorous double-blind peer review process.  
This journal does not charge APCs or submission charges.

**Contact:** Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design  
H-1121 Budapest, Zugligeti út 9–25.  
disegno@mome.hu

The full content of Disegno can be accessed online: [disegno.mome.hu](http://disegno.mome.hu)

**Published by:** József Fülöp  
Publisher: Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design, 1121 Budapest, Zugligeti út 9–25.

**ISSN:** 2064-7778 (print) **ISSN:** 2416-156X (online)

Creative Commons License

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

# Contents

## **introduction**

- 004** Márton Szentpéteri : *Fabrica and Ratiocinatio. Introductory Notes on Design and Semiotics*

## **obituary**

- 008** Mary Angela Bock: *Klaus Krippendorff (1932–2022)*

## **research papers**

- 012** Mihai Nadin: *Design, Semiotics, Anticipation*
- 042** Salvatore Zingale: *Semiotic Processes and Design Processes. Inventiveness, Dialogue, Narrativity, Translation*
- 060** Edit Újvári: *Stone Pipe and Metal Container: Design Semiotic Analysis of Sacral Objects*
- 074** Janka Csernák: *Templates of Agency: Objects of a Social Design Program for Disadvantaged Girls*
- 094** Erzsébet Hosszu: *Everyday Objects in Trauma Therapy: Examining the Material Culture of Young Refugees with the Aim of Trauma Processing*
- 114** Joana Meroz: *Beyond Biontology? Bringing Elizabeth A. Povinelli's Geontologies to Life-Centred Design*

## **essays**

- 132** Aditya Nambissan: *+ or –. A Process-Oriented Guided Inquiry Learning (POGIL) in Design Education Using Semiotics as a Tool*
- 148** Maressa Park: *Designing the Dream Ballet: From Oklahoma!'s Third Auteur to Fish's Revival and Beyond*

## **review**

- 160** Julianna Bodó and Zoltán Biró A.: *Ágnes Kapitány and Gábor Kapitány: A szimbolizáció. Hogyan cselekszünk szimbólumokkal?*

- 164** ***about the authors***

---

# STONE PIPE AND METAL CONTAINER: DESIGN SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF SACRAL OBJECTS

---

*Edit Újvári*

---

## **ABSTRACT**

*Design or the designer's activity is not only designing an object, but also a complex mode of social-cultural relations and environmental situations. This paper focuses on the semiotic analysis of two historical examples where László Moholy-Nagy's views ([1946] 1971)—which I interpret as “form adjusting itself to society”—are perfectly applicable. One object included in the design semiotic analysis is a Lakota ceremonial pipe, and the other is a sacral object of European Medieval culture, the Sainte-Foy reliquary of Conques. In both cases, the analysis is centred around formal and functional elements and materials that are impregnated with meaning. I intend to explain how, as sign vehicles (signifiers), the shape, ornamental elements, and materials of sacral objects, represent meanings and content. How is the form of these objects related to their function?*

#sacral objects, #design semiotics, #sign relation, #sacred pipe, #reliquary statue

[https://doi.org/10.21096/diseagno\\_2022\\_2eu](https://doi.org/10.21096/diseagno_2022_2eu)

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The paper is focused on objects that function in the sign relation of religious practice. I intend to answer the questions of how, as sign vehicles (signifiers), the shape, ornamental elements, and materials of sacral objects, represent meanings and contents. How is the form of these objects related to their function? Can sacral objects be understood as consciously designed and formed by fixed traditions over long periods of time? I attempt to answer these questions through a design semiotic analysis, using two characteristic sacral objects from different cultures as examples.

According to László Moholy-Nagy, the practice of design was important in all periods of human cultural history: “the ingenuity of man brought forth excellent results in every period of his history depending upon his science, technology, aesthetics and other requirements” (Moholy-Nagy [1946] 1971, 91). Do historical examples indeed confirm that the conscious design of material objects is a universal feature of human cultures, a cultural universal? According to Stefan Lengyel, design is primarily a social phenomenon that has been influenced by the predominant intellectual trends in all periods (Zalavári 2008, 9–10). Design is a special unity of artisan technology and aesthetic thinking that reinforces the basic functional principle or usability of an object. Nóra Géczy highlights that innovation in design stems from the requirement of the designer to reflect on consumers’ attitudes and emotions, and to synthesise these into a form, a structure, and colours (Géczy 2019, 47).

The design semiotic perspective adopted in this paper holds that semiotics can be perfectly applied to visual language, such as the form of objects, ornamental elements, and it can also be applied to questions of the functionality of objects. The application of this semiotic perspective is not restricted to the interpretation of artefacts—it can already be used during the design process since it may help the design become more refined, authentic, and richer in meaning (Fiell and Fiell 2007, 164–65). Therefore, semiotic study is important in design training, while the historical approach highlights the versatile and rich content of meaning, as well as the layers of functions of objects.

Charles Morris defined the three different aspects of sign analysis: semantics, syntactics, and pragmatics (Morris 1938, 1). All three can be successfully applied in design semiotics as well. Semantics deals with the signification of signs, the representation or conveying of meaning. Géczy identifies design semantics as the language of the product, since the human mind is originally characterised by the capacity for representation: we attach signs, metaphors, and thought content to our environment, as well as to the objects created by us. In this meta-language, a whole system of signs is interconnected and governed by various categories, logical relations, and functions (Géczy 2019, 219). The visual information content of design can be understood as an important element of social communication. Not only do forms have an objective and perceptible layer, they have a fictive layer as well, through which the meanings of objects are enriched by beliefs and intangible content. Real or imagined, mythical stories related to objects also have a meaning-generating function. This is especially true for the semantics of religious objects.

In Peirce's theory, the semantic sign types of index, icon, and symbol are distinguished through the relation of signifier and signified (Peirce, EP2 460–61; Szívós 2012, 187). Syntactics involves combinations of signs, and in the study of this, attention is focused on sign forms and sign structures. The system and hierarchy of the relation of signs and motifs of objects are vehicles of additional meaning, the study of which modulates semiotic analysis.

As Morris emphasises: “pragmatics is that portion of semiotics that examines the origin, uses and effects of signs in the situation in which they occur” (Morris 1938, 1). The focus of semantic analysis on content can be extended from a pragmatic perspective, such that the formal characteristics and visual elements of an object (including how these have changed over time) can come to the fore. By analysing the pragmatic dimension, we emphasise that creators of sign relations and the community of sign users exist in a society (Szőnyi 2004, 43; Szívós 2012, 120). Thanks to semiotic pragmatism—besides the semantic and syntactic elements of meaning—adequate attention can be focused on the process of meaning generation (semiosis) by bringing the relation between the user/interpretant of the sign and the sign itself to the focus of analysis (Morris 1938, 38–39). Understanding the connection of the function and the form of the object, as well as revealing the meanings originating in its use, may also be the result of pragmatic analysis.

## **2 OBJECTS IN THE SEMIOTICS OF RELIGIOUS PRACTICE**

All cultures have created diversified rites for the purpose of connecting with supernatural powers. Cultural traditions of religious practice vary, but they typically use physical instruments during ceremonies. Designers,

creators, and users endow these sacral objects with meanings that fit the religious worldview of the given culture, and besides their function, their design also reinforces their system of representation. This is exactly why their design semiotic approach is relevant, since the material, colour, and shape gain their diverse and rich meaning in a relation of signs.

Narrative tradition, which is an important source of meaning construction, is also connected to sacral objects. Applied to this tradition, semiotic research can reveal fictive layers of meaning in addition to the objective and perceptible qualities of objects. Formal analysis of signs in sacral objects reminds us of the Latin root of the word design (*designare* means to name, to designate, arrange).

All sign types established by Peirce are useful categories in the design semiotic analysis of sacred instruments. The supernatural status attributed to cultic objects and their origins and first piece are frequently highlighted in narrative tradition. The first object endowed with the authority of prototype presents the characteristics of the index. According to sacral tradition, there is, in certain cases, a direct physical relationship, and in other cases, a direct mythic/fictive relationship between the object and the supernatural power it represents or the instructions through which it was made. Icons may also play a role in the ornamental sign forms present on sacral objects as long as these sign vehicles resemble their objects. Sign vehicles of symbols, on the other hand, are related to religious sign objects, and in their case, a religious worldview and narrative tradition provide the convention that forms the basis of meaning.

Sacral objects that follow the prototype bear the characteristics of iconicity since they are considered a copy of the “original” cultic instrument. Kubler’s statement is especially applicable to sacred objects. It emphasises the dynamic process of creation, claiming that physical instruments can be considered sequences of artisan techniques,<sup>1</sup> and that these sequences are initiated by “prime objects,” then followed by “replications” and variations (Kubler 1962, 39; Kapitány and Kapitány 2005, 23). The category of “anonymous design” is often applied to them since their richly decorated formal value is the result of gradual development (Fiell and Fiell 2007, 15).

## **2.1 Function, material, and form**

The functions of sacral objects can primarily be understood in terms of the role they play in religious practice. Those who create and form an object reflect on the specific functions of its application of the practicing religious community during its design. This is also the reason why usage, which is complex and differentiated, varies through periods of time, and is an important baseline (Kapitány and Kapitány 2005, 8). The functions of objects can be reviewed from various viewpoints whose psychological

<sup>1</sup> “Everything made now is either a replica or variant of something made a little time ago and so on without break to the first morning of human time” (Kubler 1962, 2).



and sociological aspects also need to be considered independently from their usage in religious practice (Hernádi 1982, 27). Sacral objects are, first of all, the means through which religious communities believe they have contact with the supernatural; therefore, their shape, material, and usage is fixed and regulated. Another common characteristic feature of these objects is that they represent supernatural powers through their role in sacral sign relations; thus, they embody special religious values—this is reinforced by the specific and unique nature of their material and shape. Scholars typically classify them as “art” or “applied art” due to their elaborate design, the ambition to utilise the full potential of the material, and to achieve formal perfection. However, as functioning parts of religious culture, they are the products of the pre-art period (Belting 1993, xxi). Based on recent approaches of design theory, Márton Szentpéteri defines the historical research of design as interdisciplinary or post-disciplinary cultural history where art history and aesthetics do not have a distinguished role (Szentpéteri 2012, 164). In my opinion, this statement is definitely relevant to semiotic analysis of sacral objects. The pragmatic dimension of design semiotics can only be authentically revealed from the perspective of religious studies of sacral objects, but cultural studies is indispensable for the semantic approach.

Beyond their instrumental nature in religious practice, these objects have an important role in forming and strengthening social structure, as well as acquiring prestige and expressing social status (Kapitány and Kapitány 2005, 11; Hernádi 1982, 28). The examination of the psychological function, in turn, begins with the possibility of an emotional relation to the objects, which particularly applies to sacral instruments. Although touching sacral objects may have an important role in religious practice, their visual appearance is of primary importance. They express their meaning mainly through visual sign vehicles, that is, their formal elements—their material, their colour, their facture, and their pattern. Meanings and categories of values related to the material of the object also correlate with its nature, physical and chemical characteristics, and all this also affects how an object is formed (Kapitány and Kapitány 2005, 18; Zalavári 2008, 26). Physical and chemical properties of materials both establish and limit the possibilities of shaping and forming objects.

The plastic form aligns with the function, however, it also represents meanings as a whole or through its constituents. The ornamentation and decoration of an object has a sign amplifying function; thus, the form and the ornamentation must create an inseparable unity (Géczy 2019, 154–55). Ornamental components are organised into a system of signs, and their meanings and syntactic system of relations convey religious doctrines visually. These objects reinforce a designer’s way of thinking where communication of religious ideas and narratives is

manifested through the establishment of the aesthetic form, as well as the practical application of the material, structure, usage, and technological possibilities. As a result, the sacral object functions as a special semiotic instrument during religious practices: it becomes a sign vehicle for transcendent ideas and values.

### 3 DESIGN SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS

The two sacral objects I have chosen for analysis highlight the significance of the culture forms and the material. Both are elaborately designed functional objects endowed with manifold meanings, having played a distinguished role in the culture that created them. Their semiotic aspect is exceptionally rich—they contain several signs and interconnected signs, the syntactic and pragmatic aspects of which, in addition to the semantic ones, can also be analysed.

The first object included in my design semiotic analysis is the Lakota ceremonial pipe of the New Jersey State Museum, a sacral instrument of a hunter-gatherer nomadic people using stone-age technology. The other is the Sainte-Foy reliquary of Conques, a sacral object of a Middle-Age European culture skilled in the technology of metals and goldsmith art. My design semiotic analysis of both objects is focused on their sacral function as a signifier, as well as the meanings of formal components and materials, which can be well reconstructed from historical sources. Although these objects cannot be associated with specific artists, they still embody the efforts, design, and creative activities of several preceding generations that strived to create the perfect sacral object, and they therefore represent a kind of design synthesis.

#### 3.1 Lakota red-stone ceremonial pipe

The Lakota pipe was made in the second half of the nineteenth century and is a typical example of the major ceremonial instrument of the Lakota tribes (Takacs 2016, fig. 1). The material of the 70–80 cm pipe's

**FIGURE 1.** *Lakota Pipe, 19th century, collected by Charles A. Philhower. Gift of Rutgers University. Special Collections AE2010.11.118 A & B. Courtesy of New Jersey State Museum, Bureau of Archaeology.*



<sup>2</sup> *The texts describing the rites were recorded by American anthropologist Joseph E. Brown (Indiana University) in 1947. Black Elk (c. 1862–1950) actively participated in the religious culture of the Lakota-Oglala tribe in his childhood and youth, and also became an acknowledged connoisseur of sacral traditions. As Brown emphasises: “It was certainly due to this pervasive sense of mission that Black Elk wished to make this book, explaining the major rites of the Oglala Sioux, in the hope that in this manner his own people, as well as the white men, would gain a better understanding of the truths of their Indian traditions.” (Brown and Black Elk [1953] 1989, xv)*

<sup>3</sup> *Holding the pipe up with its stem to the heavens, she said: “With this sacred pipe you will walk upon the Earth; for the Earth is your Grandmother and Mother, and She is sacred. Every step that is taken upon Her should be as a prayer. The bowl of this pipe is of red stone; it is the Earth. Carved in the stone and facing the center is this buffalo calf who represents all the four-leggeds who live upon your Mother. The stem of the pipe is of wood, and this represents all that grows upon the Earth. And these twelve feathers which hang here where the stem fits into the bowl are from Wanbli Galeshka, the Spotted Eagle, and they represent the eagle and all the winged of the air. All these peoples, and all the things of the universe, are joined to you who smoke the pipe all send their voices to Wakan-Tanka, the Great Spirit. When you pray with this pipe, you pray for and with everything.” (Brown and Black Elk [1953] 1989, 6)*

bowl is a red stone called catlinite after George Catlin that came from the Pipestone Quarry, a unique geological formation of the prairie in Western Minnesota. Researchers claim that twenty-three tribes of the plains, including the Lakota, are known to be culturally connected to the red stone quarry, and archaeological research has confirmed several thousand years of usage (Catton and Krahe 2016, 22). The Lakota, as part of the Sioux people, the most famous prairie Indians, still lived in their original tribal culture when the pipe was made, a culture that lasted until the Indian wars started in the last third of the century (Utley 2004). The religious ceremonies connected to their nomadic buffalo-hunting lifestyle show numerous archaic, shaman-type elements (Hultkrantz 1979). The traditional ceremonies included elaborately ornamented pipes developed for ceremonial tobacco use (that also expressed social prestige), and they were accompanied by a set of instruments with refined ornamentation (leather pipe cases and tobacco cases). From a pragmatic perspective, Lakota society pipes were objects of exceptional importance and belonged to several sign systems, the visual motifs of which, as well as the ritual acts associated with them, were determined by tradition. Their use was connected to important events both in individual and social lifestyles, a sign of their status (Turnbaugh 2017). The ornamented pipes can also be analysed from a semantic perspective since their motifs and ornamental elements are sign vehicles. The meaning of the pipe is carried by the unity of sign components and sign patterns, therefore, a syntactic approach is also relevant.

Pipes made of red stone convey complex meanings, and are believed to enable the user to connect to transcendent powers. The pipe was used for smoking and drawing tobacco and other dried plant materials, and served as an indispensable physical instrument of communal or religious ceremonies and ritual events (Turnbaugh 2017). Several sources document the use and religious significance of pipes, how they connect people with the Great Spirit (Wakan-Tanka). According to Chief Ota K’Te: “The pipe was a tangible, visible link that joined man to Wakan Tanka and every puff of smoke that ascended in prayer unfailingly reached His presence” (Catton and Krahe 2016, 19). The major sacral functions of the pipes were also recorded in Joseph E. Brown and Black Elk’s *The Sacred Pipe* ([1953] 1989), in which the seven ceremonies of the Lakota are described on the basis of Black Elk’s narrative:<sup>2</sup> “it represents our prayers and is the path leading from earth to heaven”; “Wakan-Tanka, we are about to send a voice through our pipe to You” (76, 119). The source also describes the most widely held version of the pipe’s mythic origin, according to which the original red-stone pipe was donated to the Lakota by a mysterious and sacred woman, White Buffalo Woman.<sup>3</sup>

The ritual use of pipes is typically a community ceremony. Based on his research, James Walker, who knew Lakota culture profoundly, summarised this as follows: “the potency of the pipe may harmonise all those communing” (Walker 1917, 70). In the early twentieth century, Walker’s Lakota data providers described communal pipe smoking: “We have smoked together as friends, and the spirit of the pipe has gone up to the Great Spirit” (129). The pipe was a crucial instrument in the connection of sacrality and communal existence. “The pipe is used because the smoke from the pipe smoked in communion has the potency of the feminine god [i.e. White Buffalo Woman] who mediates between godkind and mankind, and propitiates the godkind.” (156)

Numerous versions of the myth have been recorded in oral tradition about the origin of the pipe stone, and the stone—a symbol of high iconicity—may signify the blood or flesh of ancestors or buffalos, or even the Earth. In the mid-1830’s, Catlin recorded Lakota tradition: “The Great Spirit at an ancient period, here called the Indian nations together, and standing on the precipice of the red pipe stonerock, broke from its wall a piece, and made a huge pipe by turning it in his hand, which he smoked over them, and to the north, the south, the east, and the west, and told them that this stone was red—that it was their flesh—that they must use it for their pipes of peace” (Catlin [1841] 1989, 429).

The ceremonial pipes were considered replicas of the original Sacred Pipe (Utley 2004, 54). The horizontal and vertical cylindrical shape of the carved stone pipe bowl follows the design of the original indexical “holy pipe.” The wooden pipe stem has carved ornamental motifs, and the Lakota pipe of the New Jersey State Museum has carved animal motifs as well. These are symbols that are rooted in the tribe’s traditions: “Plains tribes associate the elk with strength, endurance, and bravery while the deer is associated with gentleness, caring, and kindness. [...] Turtles are associated with long life, protection, and fertility” (Takacs 2016). The end of the stem has colourful ornamentation made with original, traditional technique that preceded bead sewing. “A portion of it is also wrapped in bird skin, as well as dyed porcupine quills whose colours of red, purple, yellow, and white closely resemble the ones used by the Lakota for the four cardinal directions (red, yellow, white, and black) which represent the earth” (Takacs 2016).

All the elements of the pipe—its materials, motifs, and colours—convey meanings: “Overall, these different aspects of the pipe stem and even the wood itself come together to represent all that grows upon the earth” (Takacs 2016). Materials and motifs form a system of syntactic relations that together determine a meaning. This Lakota pipe played a distinguished role in both social and sacral sign relations, and it was a determining instrument of communal and transcendental relations during its use due to its diverse meaning.

**FIGURE 2.** Reliquary statue of Sainte-Foy. Gold and silver gilt over a wooden core, height 85 cm, 983-1013 Church Treasury, Conques, France. Photo: Holly Hayes. Used under CC BY-NC 2.0, slightly edited. [https://www.flickr.com/photos/sacred\\_destinations/26](https://www.flickr.com/photos/sacred_destinations/26)

<sup>4</sup> After the regulation of the Councils of Carthage in the early fifth century, every consecrated altar had to contain a holy relic; thus, the demand for relics became very intense in both Eastern (Byzantine) and Western Christendom. The same principle was followed during the Carolingian era—the cult of martyrs' relics played a significant role in the Western Christianity of the Middle Ages (Klaniczay 2014, 48–51).



### 3.2 Sainte-Foy's reliquary statue

The other example I have chosen for design semiotic analysis is a piece of goldsmith art made in Europe at the end of the ninth century, which served as a distinguished instrument of Christian religious practice during that period. Saint Foy's reliquary statue (fig. 2) is still at its original location in Conques in South-France, in the church named after the saint, a young girl from Gaul, allegedly martyred for her Christian faith around 300. Because of her legend, her skull and bones were preserved and worshipped as relics, and at the end of the tenth century they were partly

placed into a precious reliquary (with the remaining parts built into the altar). Several medieval sources help us understand three things, namely the signs associated with the physical remains of a saint, the relic as an index, and the function of a sacrament as a celestial signifier. Saint Foy's legend of martyrdom and the cult associated with it is well-known, and there are also contemporary reports on the reliquary. Therefore, the object can be well analysed from pragmatic, semantic, and syntactic points of view.

Gábor Klaniczay describes the Western cult of martyrdom associated with the relic as follows: "the saint was still present on earth in these relics, while his or her immortal soul was already in heaven, at the right side of God. Heaven and Earth were united in the relics of saints—this was connected to the belief according to which martyrs had the power to intercede on behalf of the living if the latter requested such intercession at the site of their earthly remains" (Klaniczay 2014, 46). Following medieval regulations,<sup>4</sup> every altar had to contain relics, which consecrate the church, rendering it a sacral place, a point of encounter of heaven and earth (Brown 1993, 32). In the early Middle Ages "an extensive trade in relics emerged, and alongside the relics of renowned martyrs from Roman catacombs, relics of new 'martyrs' that were historically highly unlikely to have had any authenticity were placed on the market" (Klaniczay 2014, 50–51).

In the eleventh century, Bernard of Angers wrote the following about the relics: "it is a pious memorial, before which the faithful heart feels more easily and more strongly touched by solemnity, and implores more fervently the powerful intercession of the saint for its sins" (Boehm 2011).

The relic demonstrates the special power and effect of index-type signs. Since it is physically connected to its object, the relationship between the object and the sign vehicle is the most direct in the case



of this sign type; therefore, presence, uniqueness, and specificity are powerful in indexes (Szívós 2012, 187–88). Relics played an important role in religious practice; thus, their special sacral power reinforced the earthly power of ecclesiastic and secular rulers who possessed them. Guibert de Nogent's work *De sanctis et eorum pigneribus* (*On the Saints and Their Relics*), written in 1100, reveals the heightened cult of relics, as well as examples of superstitions, misbeliefs, and counterfeits in relation to them (Toman 2005, 12).

Goldsmithing is discussed in Part 3 of Theophilus Presbiter's treatise compiled in German territory around 1100, titled *De diversis artibus* (*On Various Arts*). He emphasises the value of the sacred ecclesiastical objects, "without which the divine mysteries and service of the Offices cannot continue" (Gearhart 2010, 70). Georges Duby highlights that in the early Middle Ages, the relic inserted into the goldsmith's work of art (box or reliquary statue) was placed in the church, at the "heart of arts in the Romanesque age," which in turn served as the housing of the relic (Duby 1984, 272). The treasures placed around the reliquary, as well as the offerings, provided material resources for the construction, ornamentation, and prosperity of pilgrimage churches in the Roman age (Duby 1984, 52; Toman 2005, 11). Containers of relics were made from metal or wood covered with metal and ornamented with gemstones, precious materials and had rich ornamentation. They did not only certify the bones and other physical remains but were also worthy of the sacred content (Boehm 2011). Thus, as determining elements of the cult of saints, they were characterised by elaborate design and forms that correspond to religious practice, and also by a semantic richness.

The material of the reliquaries represents sacrality. Gold and precious stones are the signs of heaven. The semantic content of this originates in the Bible—in the Old Testament, a prescription attributed to Yahweh applies to ceremonial objects and pontifical vestments, as well as their elements ornamented with precious stones and gold (Ex. 25, 28, 35, 39). The New Testament description of Celestial Jerusalem built from crystal and ornamented with gold and precious stones inspired the medieval representation of sacrality (Rev. 4:10–21). In the middle of the twelfth century, Abbot Suger of the Benedictine monastery of Saint-Denis evaluated the significance of these precious materials: "In order to perfect such a holy ornament, we added, not only these, but a great number of other expensive gems. [...] To me, I confess, it always has seemed right that the most expensive things should be used above all for the administration of the holy eucharist" (Suger). Regarding the objects of religious practice ornamented with gold and precious stones, Suger also elaborates on the significance of these objects as sign vehicles, as well as the sacral meaning and function of the sign objects of goldsmith art associated with them. Suger's writing is a testimony about tradition, emotional

<sup>5</sup> “The use of spolia, or the repurposing of Roman artifacts, connects the statue to Rome, the seat of Christianity, and its riches.” (Skyler n.d.)

motivation, and awareness of the how the materials for objects used in religious practice were selected.

*Thus sometimes when, because of my delight in the beauty of the house of God, the multicolour loveliness of the gems has called me away from external cares, and worthy meditation, transporting me from material to immaterial things, has persuaded me to examine the diversity of holy virtues, then I seem to see myself existing on some level, as it were, beyond our earthly one, neither completely in the slime of earth nor completely in the purity of heaven. By the gift of God I can be transported in an anagogical manner from this inferior level to that superior one.* (Suger)

The Sainte-Foy reliquary statue is one of the most significant examples of sacral meaning formation connected to noble metals and precious stones. The reliquary containing the skull is an outstanding goldsmith work of the period, a wooden figure with silver and gold gilt, with rich ornamentation made of precious and semi-precious stones, beads, crystals, and the antique cameos. In the opinion of researchers, the head of the reliquary was formed from a Roman sculpture.<sup>5</sup> As part of the cult of martyrs, some of the treasures and jewels offered by pilgrims were used for the ornamentation of the reliquary. The precious materials form a sequence of signs in the object’s composition, their syntactic relation conveys a united meaning, visualising heaven and redemption. As a signifier in religious practice, the martyr’s bone represents a transcendent and celestial relation through the astonishing and glistening reliquary. The shining, glittering materials and precious stones point to the description of the Heavenly Jerusalem (Rev. 21:19), which was repeated in many theological treatises in the Middle Ages. The following statement by Amy Remensnyder particularly applies to Sainte-Foy’s reliquary statue:

*While reliquaries gained their significance through the relics they contained, these containers also determined and interpreted their contents. The precious materials from which reliquaries were typically constructed symbolically made visible what was hidden, and transformed it. The actual relic was a bodily fragment, something identifiably human. The gold, silver, and precious stones of the reliquary interpreted that fragment and revealed to the viewer what could not be seen were the relic visible: the other and true nature of the saintly body, intact and glorified in heaven, reigning with Christ.* (Remensnyder 1996, 889–90)

Thanks to Sainte-Foy’s relics, the monastery of Conques has become the major southern station of the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela (Racaniello 2017, 15). The astonishing appearance of the

reliquary and its ability to attract crowds were described by Bernard, master of the Angers episcopal school in 1013, in his manuscript entitled *Liber miraculorum sancte Fidis* (*Book of the Miracles of Saint Faith*) (Duby 1984, 272–73; Boehm 2011).

The function of the relics of Conques is embedded in Christian religious practice: believers have attributed to it celestial help and support, as well as the power to heal eye diseases and blindness. This pragmatic dimension established the sign relation in which the martyr girl's remains (her skull, as an index sign) represented celestial intercession and communion with Christ. The 85 cm tall reliquary forms a human being with a crown, holding her arms up, wearing an ornamented dress, which is the "effigy" of the saint in its function as an icon. Besides the spectacle of the glowing gold and precious stones, the effect is achieved by the wide-open and steady look, which Bernard of Angers describes: "When they saw it for the first time, all in gold and sparkling with precious stones and looking like a human face, the majority of the peasants thought that the statue was really looking at them and answering their prayers with her eyes" (Skyler). On the left base of the throne, the symbol of Christ, a lamb in a medallion can be observed, a scene from the crucifixion in the right, and four crystal spheres frame the top of the throne. These typical motifs of Christian iconography confirm the martyr girl's connection with Christ and the celestial sphere; thus, her role of intermission for the believers.

#### **4 SUMMARY**

Semiotic analysis has revealed that the basic proposition of design, according to which design is strongly related to everyday life and culture, equally applies to the two sacral objects discussed here, even though they are instruments of religious practice from different cultures. Both the ceremonial pipe and the reliquary statue are works of art created according to the religious life, myths, and religious practices of the communities in which they were designed and created. Both the materials and the ornamentation represent an awareness of form corresponding to function, semantic abundance, and the syntactic harmony of signs and sign patterns. The semiotic analysis of their visual information content can reveal not only semantic and syntactic aspects of these objects as signs and the sign patterns placed on them, but also pragmatic dimensions of meaning formation and sign usage in light of historical sources. Based on the design semiotic analysis, it can be stated that these objects were organic parts of the sacral communication of the societies that created and used them; therefore, they can be considered material impressions of their religious cultures and systems of values.



## REFERENCES

- Belting, Hans. 1993. *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*. Translated by Edmund Jephcott. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Boehm, Barbara D. 2011. "Relics and Reliquaries in Medieval Christianity." *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. [https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/relic/hd\\_relic.htm](https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/relic/hd_relic.htm)
- Brown, Joseph E., and Black Elk. (1953) 1989. *The Sacred Pipe: Black Elk's Account of the Seven Rites of the Oglala Sioux*. Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Brown, Peter. 1993. *A szentkultusz kialakulása és szerepe a kereszténységben*. Translated by Marianne Sághy. Budapest: Atlantisz.
- Catlin, George. (1841) 1989. *North American Indians: Letters and Notes on Their Manners, Customs, and Conditions, Written During Eight Years' Travel Amongst the Wildest Tribes of Indians in North America, 1832–1839*. New York: Penguin Group.
- Catton, Theodore, and Diane L. Krahe. 2016. *The Blood of the People. Historic Resource Study. Pipestone National Monument*, Minnesota: National Park Service U.S. Department of the Interior. <http://www.npshistory.com/publications/pipe/hrs.pdf>
- Fiell, Charlotte, and Peter Fiell. 2007. *Design kézikönyv. Fogalmak, anyagok, stílusok*. Translated by Júlia Kada. Budapest: Taschen – Vince.
- Gearhart, Heidi. 2010. "Theophilus' *On Diverse Arts*: The Persona of the Artist and the Production of Art in the Twelfth Century." PhD dissertation, The University of Michigan. <https://arhpee.typepad.com/Theophile%20par%20Gearhart.pdf>
- Géczy, Nóra. 2019. *Design. Tér- és formakultúra*. Budapest: Scolar.
- Hernádi, Miklós. 1982. *Tárgyak a társadalomban*. Budapest: Kozmosz.
- Hultkrantz, Åke. 1979. "The Traditional Symbolism of the Sun Dance Lodge among the Wind River Shoshoni." *Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis*, 10: 70–95. <https://doi.org/10.30674/SCRIPTA.67119>
- Kapitány, Ágnes, and Kapitány, Gábor. 2005. *Tárgyak szimbolikája*. Budapest: Új Mandátum.
- Klanciczay, Gábor. 2014. *Az ereklyék kultusza a középkorban/Cult of Relics in the Middle Ages*. In *Kép és kereszténység: Vizuális médiumok a középkorban/Image and Christianity/Visual Media in the Middle Ages*, edited by Péter Bokody, 46–65. Pannonhalma: Pannonhalmi Főapátság.
- Kubler, George. 1962. *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Moholy-Nagy, László. (1946) 1971. "Industrial Design." In *Moholy-Nagy*, edited by Richard Kostelanetz, 90–93. London: The Penguin Press.

Morris, Charles W. 1938. *Foundations of the Theory of Signs*. International Encyclopedia of Unified Sciences 1 (2). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Peirce, Charles Sanders 1998. *The Essential Peirce. Selected Philosophical Writings*. Vol. 2. (1893–1913), edited by the Peirce Edition Project. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Racaniello, France Kristen N. 2017. “The Shrine System: Votive Culture and Cult Sculpture, Enshrining Space in 11th to 13th Century.” Master’s thesis, City University of New York. [https://academicworks.cuny.edu/hc\\_sas\\_etds/148/](https://academicworks.cuny.edu/hc_sas_etds/148/)

Remensnyder, Amy. 1996. “Legendary Treasure at Conques: Relics and Imaginative Memory.” *Speculum* 71 (4): 884–906. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2865723>

Skyler, Leslie. n.d. “Gold in Christian Reliquaries.” <http://projects.leadr.msu.edu/medievalart/exhibits/show/gold-in-christian-reliquaries/curatorial-essay> (accessed April 18, 2022)

Suger, Abbot. *On What was Done in His Administration*. Translated by David Burr. Medieval Sourcebook (website). <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/sugar.asp>

Szentpéteri, Márton. 2012. “Mítoszok a designkultúrában.” *Replika* (3): 159–68. [http://www.replika.hu/system/files/archivum/replika\\_80-15\\_szentpeteri\\_1.pdf](http://www.replika.hu/system/files/archivum/replika_80-15_szentpeteri_1.pdf)

Szívós, Mihály. 2012. *A jeltől a kódig. Rendszeres szemiotika*. Budapest: Loisir.

Szőnyi, György Endre. 2004. *Pictura & Scriptura. Hagományalapú kulturális reprezentációk huszadik századi elméletei*. Vol. 10 of *Ikonológia és műértelmezés*, edited by Endre György Szőnyi and Attila Kiss. Szeged: JATEPress.

Takacs, Tatiana. 2016. “Lakota Pipe.” *New Jersey Archeology* (blog). August 3, <https://newjerseyarchaeology.wordpress.com/2016/08/03/lakota-pipe/>

Toman, Rolf. 2005. *Román stílus. Építészet – szobrászat – festészet*. Translated by Lujza Havas and Ágnes Körber. Budapest: Vince.

Turnbaugh, William A. 2017. “Native American Red Stone Pipes.” *Journal of Antiques and Collectibles*. <https://journalofantiques.com/features/native-american-red-stone-pipes/>

Utley, Robert M. 2004. “A lándzsa és a pajzs. Ülő Bika élete és kora.” In *Robert M. Utley: A lándzsa és a pajzs. Ülő Bika élete és kora; Joseph E. Brown: A szent pipa*, series edited by Zoltán Fejős and Mihály Sárkány and translated by Péter Hahner and Teodóra Bökönyi, 9–456. Budapest: Osiris

Walker, James R. 1917. “The Sun Dance and Other Ceremonies of the Oglala Division of the Teton Dakota.” Vol. 16, part 2 of *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History*. AMNT Digital Repository. <https://digitallibrary.amnh.org/handle/2246/201>

Zalavári, József. 2008. *A forma tervezése. Designökológia*. Budapest: Scolar.