
In ancient cultures, smell and scent played an important role in religious contexts: smell for example was omnipresent in sacrifices and rites, or certain fragrances were considered associated with specific deities, to name just two instances. Christianity evolved out of that ancient context. Susan Ashbrook Harvey, in her book Scenting Salvation, thus takes this as a starting point to investigate the stance that early Christianity took regarding the olfactory sense. She distinguishes between two moments in which scent played a significant role: firstly, fragrances have carried important meaning on a metaphorical level, and, secondly, in the performance of rituals. Scent, via our olfactory sense, is thereby wedded to physicalness. From the start, Ashbrook Harvey combines the layer of smell with religious messages in other embodiments, thereby demonstrating how complex the relationship is between such divergent communication media. As scent is an ephemeral phenomenon, and hardly any fragrances have remained from ancient times, the exploration of smell in early Christianity has to ensue from other sources. Ashbrook Harvey's analysis relies mainly on the textual tradition, and she has examined a great bulk of sources dealing with the olfactory sense in early Christianity. Once she makes also a reference to images: The cover illustration shows a medieval codex from the British museum: here, the onlookers were depicted as holding their noses when witnessing the resurrection of Lazarus, a hint at the prevailing stench of a decomposing carcass. Aroused by this example, a hunger for more insights into iconographic sources of (early) Christian times is nourished, but not stilled.

Ashbrook Harvey structured the table of contents thematically, yet she combines her synchronic approach with a diachronic view. The first chapter provides a contextualisation of early Christianity and its scent culture. The author hereby contrasts the different olfactory aspects in Christendom with its surrounding Graeco-Roman trends, but also with the Jewish tradition. The chapter starts with texts about the burning of the martyr Polycarp, followed by a short discussion of the ancient tradition of sacrifice. Next, a treatment of the everyday world of scent is presented, before the chapter closes on fragrances associated to deities. Ashbrook Harvey hereby traces the shifting stance early Christendom took regarding the significance of scent. Starting off with a certain demureness towards creating their own scent culture, smell soon turns into an important element of the separate identity. Mainly two aspects prevailing in the environment of early Christianity were responsible for that
shift in attitude: on the one hand, incense as a sign and characterisation of sacrifice, thus an ancient way of communication between the secular and the divine sphere, and on the other hand, perfume as an indicator of divine presence and a symbol of benediction.

The second chapter focuses on the development of Christian rituals in the fourth and fifth century and on the significance therein of the body. The human body is getting redefined in these rituals, the body receives a new identity. Ashbrook Harvey reveals the significant role scents, their use and reception, adopt in such context. Insights can be gained regarding the change in meaning of the ritual and of the body in early Christianity. The chapter is rounded off by an interesting excursion on offerings of burning essences in the Syrian *Transitus Mariae*, an uncanonised report about Maria’s passing. By means of this textual example, the author illustrates to which extent and effect the burning of essences was ingrained in Christian practice.

The third chapter explores how the Christian agreement came into place, that the Christian body in his experiences can yield knowledge about God. Christianity affiliated ancient philosophical-epistemological concepts about the meaning of sense perception and combined it with biblical messages and theological thought. Especially the olfactory sense carries an important role. By virtue of its invisibility and inaudibility, but perceptibility, scent — or the lack thereof — was regarded as a sign of divine presence or absence. Scents in a way had the ability to travel between the secular and the divine domain. The olfactory sense became linked to Christian identity, to the moral stance of a person, and the human relation to God. This is shown by the numerous early Christian pieces of evidence — and the author presents an elaborate selection — employing olfactory imagery, especially in the areas of hymnography and Christian sermons.

In the fourth chapter, Ashbrook Harvey focuses on early Christian asceticism and its then contemporary discourses. Asceticism is a form of devoutness outside of clerical structure and institutional habits; at its centre lies the individual in his or her social and political embedding. The author shows that Christian thinkers often employed the terminology of asceticism to describe sensory contexts. By means of models of asceticism, the adequate use of senses is being presented and the proper location for certain perceptions announced. And again, it is the olfactory sense that plays an important role in this new orientation of Christian perception.

In the fifth chapter, this coherence gets further elaborated by means of the example of bad smell. Particularly in the early Christian understanding of stench, we can decipher the complexity of Christian scent culture and its close link to practised asceticism. Agreeable smell was associated with the divine,