

Mapping Invaluable Items in Norwegian Churches

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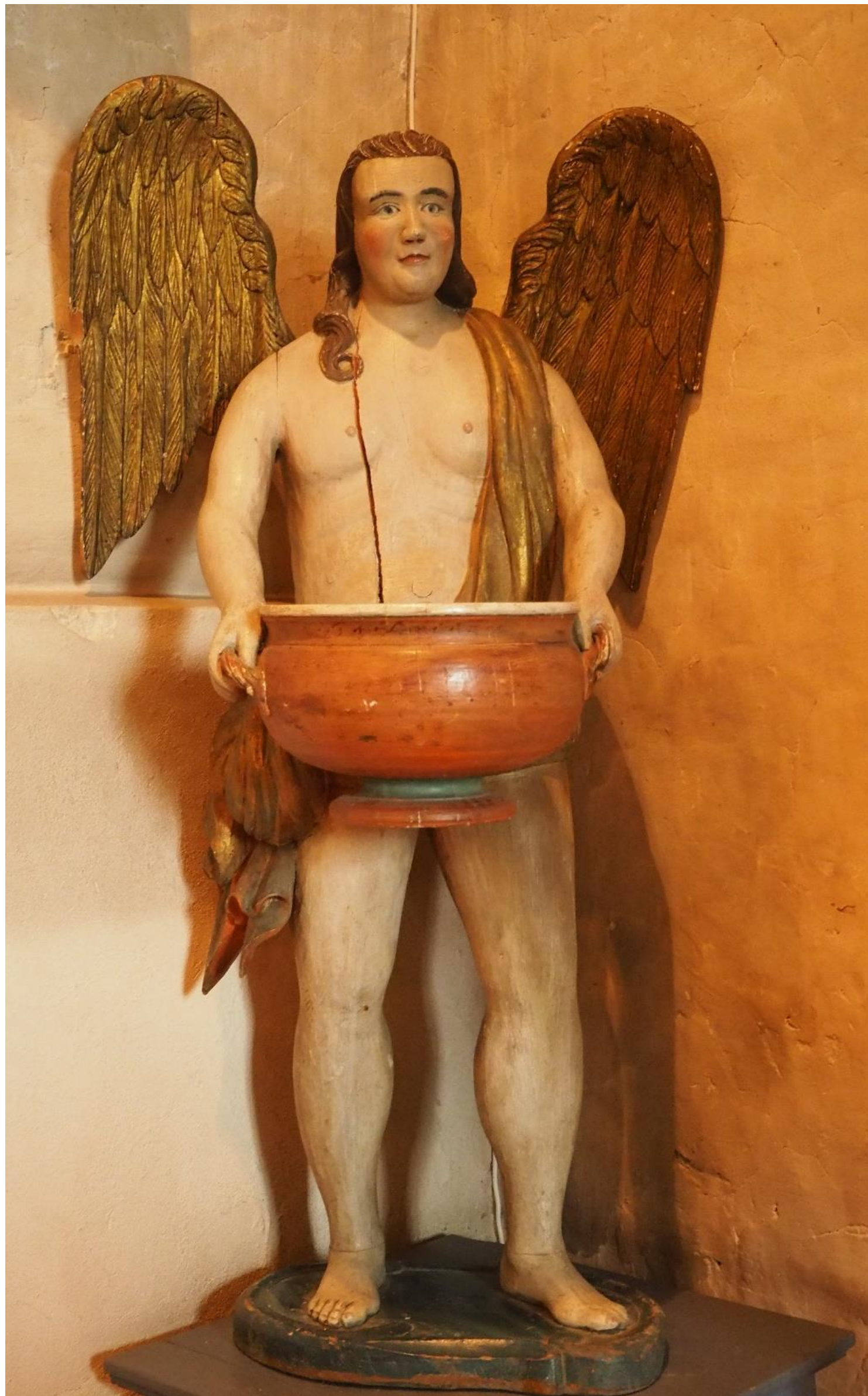


Fig.1 Baptismal angel in Ulnes Church.
Photo: E. Andersen



Fig.2 Conservation of a 18th c. Chasuble.
Photo: Bevaringstjenesten ved
Museumssenteret i Hordaland

In 2021 all art, furniture, and inventory in Norwegian churches was registered to establish a knowledge base on what kind of cultural heritage artefacts are preserved, and what their general state of conservation is. The inventory covers a wide range of objects, from altarpieces, pulpits and baptismal fonts, to clockworks, books, textiles, and wafer boxes. Almost 60 different categories of objects were identified and registered.

The purpose of establishing a national overview of church inventory is to provide information and assess the need for professional expertise in the restoration and conservation of different kinds of objects and materials.

When Norway ratified UNESCO's Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2006, it also took on a national commitment to preserve traditional craft knowledge. To secure the art and inventory, we also need skilled craftsmen in the future. The mapping of the specialist skills necessary to preserve, restore and repair was thus an important part of the project. The compilation of these various techniques is a reminder of how the tangible and the intangible cultural heritage are inextricably linked.

Method: To map the church inventory, their material, age and state of conservation, several different quantitative and qualitative sources were used. The method aimed at utilizing both professional expertise and the knowledge of the local stakeholder.

An electronic questionnaire (*Kirkekontrollen 2021*) was sent to all local church building managers in Norway. They were responsible for a total of 1.637 churches, built over a period of almost 900 years. A total of 1.276 responses were registered, which represents 77 % of all churches.

Throughout the recording process, a team of professional advisers defined categories, provided an overview of the relevant sources, and contributed to quality assurance of analyses and results.

Results: The survey and the summary report ("Kirkenes særskilte verdier") constitute a unique knowledge base regarding the current state of art and inventory in the churches. It can be used in further work to develop the management system for Norwegian church inventory, as well as addressing the many blind spots and knowledge gaps in need of attention in the coming years.

The work was initiated by the Norwegian Association for Church Employers, Directorate for Cultural Heritage and Norwegian Crafts Institute.