

## Introduction

# Weep Not for Me . . . But Weep on Yourselves

*And then some had pity on [Saint James] and wept, and he said to them: Weep not for me, for I go to life, but weep on yourselves, whom torments perdurable be due unto. And the butchers cut off the thumb of his right hand. . . . And then the butcher cut off the forefinger. . . . They cut off, after, his right hand . . . the right arm . . . the right leg to the thigh, then Saint James was grieved in great pain . . . And then the butchers began to fail and were weary. . . . and then the blessed James cried and said: . . . Lord, I have no fingers to lift up to thee, no hands that I may enhance to thee; my feet be cut off, and my knees so that I may not kneel to thee, and am like to a house fallen . . . hear me, Lord Jesu Christ, and take out my soul from this prison. And when he had said this, one of the butchers smote off his head.*

—Jacobus de Voragine, “Saint James the Dismembered (*Intercisus*),” *Golden Legend*

Among the many martyrdom accounts in the *Legenda Aurea* (*Golden Legend*), the death of Saint James the Dismembered, *Jacobus Intercisus*, is perhaps the most violent and terrifying. James was a beloved intimate of the pagan Persian king and evoked the jealousy of his fellow princes, who vengefully betrayed his Christian beliefs to the sovereign. Summoned to the king, James refused to bow down before the idols and adore them. He was sentenced to gradual tortures: first, each finger of his right hand was cut off, one by one; then each finger of his left hand; then each toe of his left foot was excised, one by one, in order to intensify the suffering; then each toe of the left foot. The Middle High German version of his vita in the *Alsatian Golden Legend*, compiled during the first half of the fourteenth century,<sup>1</sup> provides an even more devastating detail. It specifies that before the torturers finally cut off his hands and legs, they separated the skin of his flank from the flesh, all the way up to his hips. The account uses terminology evoking the process of flaying young calves: “Hie noch snittent sú ime den lircken waden abe vnd scheltent die hut von dem beine vncz an die huf” (Then they also cut off his left calf and peeled the skin off his leg up to his hip).<sup>2</sup> So dreadful was James’s mutilated body and so grueling was the violence of the assault that

even the executioners were mentally and physically exhausted from their work and had to pause before finishing the job. Once recovered, they slashed off James's hands and legs, leaving only his head and breast, a fallen house without pillars, literally a "talking bust," begging for the final stroke. Finally, he was decapitated.

Saint James the Dismembered's vita is fascinating in many respects. Unlike the majority of martyrs, he did not convert to Christianity but was born to Christian parents, married a Christian wife, and lived a pious life, never undergoing an unexpected conversion. Moreover, most martyrs do not betray distress in the face of the inflicted pain; rather, they demonstrate their impassivity and love of suffering (philopassianism), thereby offering readers limited models of response. The detailed narrative of Saint James's tortures provides much more complex and contradictory modes of reactions. The legend prescribes how readers were to imagine James's pain in their own bodies, both physically and emotionally, evoking notions of affective piety, *imitatio Christi* (the imitation of Christ), philopassianism, and, concomitantly, sheer agony. Although James praises the Lord with each act of mutilation and willingly accepts the torments as acts of self-sacrifice, he does truly suffer. The text indicates his anguish clearly, stating that he grieved in "unspeakable pain."

The Middle High German version makes his agony explicit. In several stages of his torment, Saint James the Dismembered addresses God directly, saying that he is overwhelmed by the pains of death ("Die smerzen des dodes hant mich vmbgeben" [The pains of death surrounded me]) and crying out in great pain for Christ's help ("Do rief er von grossen smerzen: Herre ihesu Criste hilf mir, wenne die fússen des dodes hant mich umbgeben" [Then he cried out from great pain: Lord Jesus Christ help me, when the feet of death are surrounding me]). James physically experiences the violence

inflicted on his body and the pains of the flesh, without transforming them into the joyful salvation of the soul.<sup>3</sup> Whereas the mutilations of his body and his pious reactions are described at length, overflowing with conventional, laudatory formulas, the language and phrases used to describe his pain are rather laconic and succinct, rendering them all the more gripping and powerful. Being aware of his bodily pain, the saint addresses his spectators, both Christian and pagan, saying, "Weep not for me, for I go to life, but weep on yourselves, whom torments perdurable be due unto." Adopting the words of Luke 23:28, he seemingly evokes the notion of the *imitatio Christi*, urging the crowd to imagine his bodily sensations as their own. However, since his audience was mainly non-Christian, his evocation of empathy with the physical misery he was experiencing would not have been understood in the context of the *imitatio*. Both pious and pagan audiences, as well as the executioners themselves who "began to fail and were weary," were overwhelmed by the acts of violence. Being mutilated beyond imagination, a destroyed house (in evocation of Christ's Incarnation), Saint James begged God—"Heed me, Lord Jesus Christ, and lead my soul out of prison!," inducing Neoplatonic and Augustinian terminology. This final exclamation, however, is laconic, devoid of the exaltation or laudation of either God or of the martyrdom as is often found in conventional legends. It is a cry of despair from a violated body.

*Visual Aggression: Images of Martyrdom in Late Medieval Germany* deals with the "galleries of violence"—the series of images of figures being tortured—that appeared in fourteenth-century German-speaking lands, the "visual aggression" by which these galleries addressed their viewers, and the "bodily imagination" they engendered. Each of these phrases requires elucidation. Fourteenth-century martyr cycles in the Upper and Middle Rhine regions include

serial portrayals of violence presented with an unprecedented immediacy that stressed the technicality and brutality of bodily tortures, appearing almost as manuals of violent acts. Rather than unfolding the entire vitae of their protagonists, these cycles isolate and appropriate specific episodes of bodily injury from the narratives of the hagiographies and recombine and compile them with types of torture from different legends, from real life, or from the imagination. Consequently, these series constitute visual galleries with an overwhelming multiplicity of violent acts, including all stages of decapitation (from the placing of the head on the chock, the raising of the axe or sword, the delivering of the final stroke, and the ultimate detaching of the head), in addition to splitting skulls, amputating limbs, enucleating eyes, yanking teeth, ripping out nails, boiling alive, cutting off breasts, chopping off fingers and feet, flaying alive, sawing off heads, battering to death with pig's legs, stabbing with iron nails, breaking on the wheel, and other repugnant horrors.

In several cases, the featured executions are depicted in such an extreme fashion and so profusely that the saints themselves, the protagonists of the holy stories, can no longer be identified; only the idea of the bodily mutilation remains recognizable. The aggregation and amalgamation of torments, sometimes of just the twelve apostle martyrs and sometimes of more than thirty figures, offered a new visual experience to the late medieval viewer. Decontextualized from their specific legends, hagiographies, and devotional practices, these portrayals ocularly assaulted the bodies and minds of the viewers with such violence that seeing the series virtually amounted to an act of visual aggression. As in the account of Saint James the Dismembered, these cycles portrayed a multiplicity of bodies under a constant barrage of attacks, and they subjected their viewers to similarly repeated aggressions.

Graphic descriptions of brutal torments imposed on the persecuted bodies of the martyrs are an integral component of medieval piety and hagiography and belong to a wider cultural discourse that mediated social, theological, and ethical categories.<sup>4</sup> From the era of martyrdom in the early days of Christianity to late medieval philopassianism,<sup>5</sup> the rhetoric of martyrdom conceptualized the Christian self as sufferer.<sup>6</sup> Cruel acts of mutilation were reported without moral censure, depicting their protagonists as gentle figures;<sup>7</sup> violent juridical executions were perceived as fine and moving;<sup>8</sup> and physical suffering and injury were experienced as following and participating in the sacrifice of the Lord, acts of *imitatio Christi*: as such, violence was interpreted as means for attaining salvation.<sup>9</sup> It is therefore surprising that the monumental visual arts adopted the rhetoric of violence only reluctantly and relatively late—beginning around the eleventh century and becoming fully assimilated in monumental art during the fourteenth century.

Art historians have interpreted medieval violence imagery in relation to the exegetical tradition of manuscript illumination, linking it symbolically with either an epitome of the triumph of faith and orthodoxy or with the *bellum spirituale* (spiritual war), an interior, reflective battle of penance striving for the conquest of evil.<sup>10</sup> Monumental representations of battling monsters, warring knights, *militum Christi* (soldiers of Christ), and the tortured damned in hell were subordinated to an allegorical and impersonal interpretive framework that embodied the struggle of conflicting ideologies.<sup>11</sup> Even the most horrifying depictions of corporeal torments in the many later medieval Last Judgment portals were allegorical embodiments of the cardinal sins or the opposed virtues and vices, although these were sometimes depicted in accordance with medieval punitive practices. This conceptual vantage point distanced the

images and neutralized their threat, at times rendering them almost comic. In some cases, the devils even seem to be ordinary figures in costume, such as the demon dragging the allegory of *Luxuria* on his back in the tympanum at Chartres, circa 1220, who wears a kind of a fool's hat with a donkey ear (fig. 1). Appearing more like a camouflaged actor than a real demon, this fiend is clearly marked as an allegory and not



as an actual threat to the bodily integrity of the viewers.<sup>12</sup>

Apart from the horrors of the Last Judgment, the most frequent portrayals of violent acts in monumental art were embedded in narrative cycles dedicated to the passions of the martyrs. Unlike late medieval galleries of violence, these earlier cycles tended to be concrete and comprehensive, revealing the entire vitae of their protagonists from their preaching or miracle-working through their persecutions, interrogations, torments, executions, and deaths, culminating with the triumphant introduction of their relics into the church in a ceremonial procession and their heavenly reward.<sup>13</sup> The galleries of violence discussed in this book lack any such narrative structure or visual similarity to the Passion of Christ. They offer a new experience not yet encoded in established visual tradition. Moreover, in spite of the fact that galleries of violence were fairly common in German-speaking lands from the mid-fourteenth to the mid-fifteenth centuries, constituting a distinctive artistic and cultural phenomenon, they have seldom been studied. I suggest that they might serve as a springboard to reflect on larger problems of image theory, response, and the visual discourse of late medieval violence.

Earlier studies of depictions of violence from this period have focused primarily on the spectacle of the Crucifixion and representations of the tormented body of Christ, emphasizing the *imitatio Christi* and the role of suffering in mysticism and female spirituality in particular.<sup>14</sup> In this study, I examine what may be termed the rhetoric of “visual aggression”: namely, the monumental public art of violence, stripped from its devotional context and thus experienced as brutal acts inflicted somatically upon the bodies of the viewers. The term “visual aggression” defines both the content of the images and their effect upon viewers. While acknowledging multiple

FIGURE 1 Chartres Cathedral, Last Judgment Portal, south façade, *Luxuria Dragged by a Demon*, ca. 1220. Photo: Gili Shalom.

readings of martyrdom representations in relation to devotional practices, relic claims, and the discourse on the fragmented body, I suggest that the galleries of violence might have offered another kind of experience. It is my contention that extracting the brutal acts of execution from the narrative of the saints' vitae not only encouraged an affective piety through somatic identification but also decontextualized the imagery from its exclusively religious context and relocated it in an ethical discourse. As a consequence, violence was conceptualized as a moral problem and a subject of artistic speculation. I do not deny the intended devotional purposes of the imagery but, rather, suggest that these intentions have been viewed from more than one consolidating perspective and that their organizational principles were multilayered and far more complex than merely pious.

Just like the acts in the vita of Saint James the Dismembered, the galleries of violence were directed toward the bodies and souls of the viewers. James warns his spectators that they should weep for themselves and their future torment, suggesting that what they see is what they will experience themselves bodily. His pain will be eased in the afterlife, but his corporeal suffering will become theirs. His interjection leads us to the third term guiding this study: "bodily imagination." Since the groundbreaking studies by Hans Belting, Jeffrey Hamburger, Caroline Walker Bynum, and Horst Bredekamp, the role of the body as a medium in the perception of artworks and in devotional practices of medieval affective piety and mystical experience has been explored and discussed extensively.<sup>15</sup> I, however, focus on the somaesthetic experience that I dub "bodily imagination." By this I mean the ways in which the images encouraged viewers, on the one hand, to imagine the depicted tortures and pains on and through their own bodies as their own suffering and, on the other

hand, to project their own bodies, imaginations, and range of associations related to the visualized torments upon the images. This manner of corporeal understanding and response was instantaneous and unmediated by theological ideas. It preceded the encoding of violence imagery into the religious experience.

The supposition that lies behind this endeavor relies on somaesthetic philosophy that argues that our so-called spiritual, mental, and intellectual comprehension and assumptions—and by implication our perception of images—is predetermined by our immediate physical and somatic experiences, which is a precondition for any further cognitive data processing. "Thinking through the body," as Richard Shusterman articulates, is concerned with the way we use the living body as a site of sensory appreciation and self-fashioning.<sup>16</sup> By inquiring into the visual apparatus vis-à-vis the specific legends that might have informed the galleries of violence, as well as into the accounts of real-life violence, I speculate on how those images might have been experienced in bodily and imaginative ways.

Since the formative studies of Johan Huizinga and Norbert Elias, medieval violence was regarded as deeply rooted in a mentality of unrestrained emotional impulses of "nature" and "of the flesh," of a society inflamed by extreme passion, oscillating between uncivilized cruelty and kindhearted tenderness, asceticism and hedonism, hatred and remorse.<sup>17</sup> For these scholars, it was only toward the sixteenth century that the absolutist state aspired to reduce aggression and monopolize the use of violence. However, that assumption has long been challenged owing to the continuity of ritualized violence from the Middle Ages to the early modern era.<sup>18</sup> Thus later studies view the excess of violent behavior as a symptom of a social crisis and disruption. But what if violence imagery tells another story? Human history has always been marked



by violence, but violence has not always been a subject of art. Moreover, violent acts have traditionally been depicted in the allegorical and narrative context of hunting, war, and moralistic struggles between good and evil, but here, for the first time in Western civilization, violence was depicted as if for its own sake. The torments of the martyrs are taken out of all context to such a degree that we cannot even identify the figures as saints—we see only vivid torture. Why was this done? What does it teach us about the history of violence and its representations? Why in these locations? Why at these times? What do these mutilated figures disclose about early modern individuality?

As each chapter of this book demonstrates, the concept of violence and the attitude toward violent behavior underwent a drastic change during the early modern period in the German-speaking space, particularly in the regions of southern Germany. The fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were the time of the emergence of centralized governments, which aspired to regulate violence and violent behavior in a highly ritualized way. This regulation meant a break with the *leges barbarorum* (old Germanic folk law) in favor of a systemized civic jurisdiction that also gradually departed from the ordeal and the *judicium Dei* (judgment of God). Until the mid-thirteenth century, the operative law, which was derived from Germanic warrior culture and feudal loyalty, was based on oral traditions that made up the customary law. It was basically a practical law, “sanctified” by usage rather than a coherent code, and its authority was intentionally not dependent on being written so as to preclude any contradictions with the more codified Roman law.<sup>19</sup>

The burgeoning municipal courts of southern Germany, including Swabia, Alsace, and stretching up into Franconia, required their own kinds of *Gerichtsordnung* (tribunal regulation), such as mercantile law or urban law,

which had their particular courts. The control of violence and the stabilization of lawmaking became principal concerns of the civic institutions, which resulted in an amalgamation of canon, customary, Germanic, and Roman law.<sup>20</sup> These efforts necessitated new supervision and documentation methods that provided detailed reports regarding violent behavior, assaults, restrictions on the bearing and use of weapons, and rituals of public executions in late medieval cities. The new monitoring systems provide us with information about how violence was recorded according to various criteria and how cities strove to eliminate private and spontaneous violence. Such reports listed not only the juridical punishments, tortures, and physical violence meted out in answer to crimes but also the quotidian violence in the streets, from beggars’ knife fights, merchants’ feuds, and acts of revenge for telltales to the counting of the number of chopped-off fingers in an execution or on a battlefield. Gradually, violence became regulated within the city walls, which served as the physical and legal boundaries of civic jurisdiction. Beyond the walls, violence continued as always, uncontrolled and chaotic.<sup>21</sup>

The most effective tool for social indoctrination and surveillance was the so-called liturgy of the public execution, which became a calculated performance in which the new urban juridical institutions could manifest their vaunted power and authority. As Mitchell B. Merback discusses at length, the process was carried out in four ritual spheres: in the court, outside the town hall, along the processional route, and within the execution grounds.<sup>22</sup> After the list of offenses was read in a closed courtroom and the sentence was pronounced, the process proceeded into the public sphere. The centerpiece of criminal justice was the procession as a staged spectacle. The accused confessed their crimes and repented while being led, or sometimes dragged, along a specific route in a procession that included the

recitation of prayers, supplications, souvenirs, and demonstrative pain. Upon arriving at the site of the execution, the convicted individual was handed over to the executioner, who repeated the sentence and performed several symbolic acts. Some such ritualized penalties and defamations are recorded in the famous *Sachsenspiegel* (The Saxon Mirror), dated between 1220 and 1235, although more often than not, the legal symbolism was inconsistent. The ritual then became a dialogue between the criminal and the engaged audience in which—as a token of their repentance—the condemned asked for more torments and mutilations to be inflicted upon the body before the final blow was struck. As the trial itself had not been public, the performative qualities of the procession and its juxtaposing of crime and punishment were crucial for the spectators' edification. As recorded in cities like Strasbourg, Augsburg, Ulm, and Nuremberg, such processions became elaborate orchestrated events. In Nuremberg, the fingers of a murderer would be cut off one by one, just like those of Saint James; then the condemned would be tortured with iron pincers and dragged through the city, all the while encouraging the executioner to enhance and prolong the suffering as much as possible. The spectators would pray for heavenly forgiveness and recite many wishes for the criminal's soul. Leaning the head to the right would be the sign for the executioners to proceed with the beheading.<sup>23</sup> In a case of a group execution, as in Augsburg, the convicted individuals would compete with one another as to who would give the other the privilege of going to the gallows first, while offering every limb of their bodies to be tortured and mutilated and crying in remorse.

Society inscribed its values on the body and the physical punishments left their marks upon it. The violence of the punitive system and the physical injuries it mandated were thus signs of transgression measured on the body. According

to Valentin Groebner, in the cities of Nuremberg, Augsburg, and Ulm, for example, thieves would have their ears cut off, perjurers and oath breakers would lose the finger they had raised under oath, perpetrators of sexual crimes had their noses cut off, forgers would be deprived of their hands, and sinners who had glimpsed forbidden sights would have their eyes gouged out.<sup>24</sup> This measuring and quantifying of bodily violence vis-à-vis the violent deed was something new, even if still lacked a systematic coherence. This change in the bodily manifestation of moralistic status derived from a new attitude toward the human body in Thomistic thought.

I begin this book by discussing how, prior to the fourteenth century, violence was not necessarily understood as something bodily or negative. If one caused an individual to deny God or salvation, that was considered a violent act—in the spiritual realm; injuring sinners' bodies was healing and interpreted as a means of saving their souls and shortening their time of torment in purgatory. However, in the new formulation of Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), the body was perceived in a relative equivalence to the soul, making up a coherent psychosomatic unity (instead of as dichotomous, hierarchical entities as per the Augustinian tradition).<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, the spread of Dominican schools along the Upper and Middle Rhine disseminated the idea of the body having the same status as the soul. Once the body and soul were considered relatively (if never entirely) equal, the spectacle of physical aggression may have been experienced as violence. A major consequence of this new approach was that the body was deemed the private property of the individual. Prior to that time, the body was thought of as belonging to the Church, on loan from God, and it could at any moment be called into the service of society. But if the body is one's own property, boundaries and legal questions arise as to what extent anyone can harm someone

else's body. Violence thus became a crucial category in wider cultural respects. This shift is philologically illustrated by the very fact that the word for violence—*gewalte*—was only coined during this period. Until then, violence had simply meant dominion, authority, or political power, but at that point it became what we understand today as negative, physical violence that can be measured according to certain criteria.<sup>26</sup>

It is significant that this philological turn occurred only in the German-speaking regions; neither Old English nor Old French has an equivalent term, possessing instead a range of expressions that circle around violence and never really fully define it. The very fact that the moral definition of violence came into being at a specific time and space had profound implications for late medieval culture in the Germanic regions. Such localized developments in the German-speaking realm are attested to, for example, in the Middle High German epics, which differentiate and reflect upon various forms of violence: between honor-retributive, juridical, and demonstrative, and especially between legitimate and illegitimate violence (positive and negative), the latter being behavior that does not have a positive function in the society and thus might destroy the individual and cause unjustified suffering.<sup>27</sup>

The incentive for this study was my continuing perplexity and astonishment when I saw the galleries of violence in the Parler milieu (1350–90) along the Upper Rhine and Swabia in such minsters as those of Schwäbisch Gmünd, Thann, and Ulm.<sup>28</sup> Although these important Gothic edifices and their extremely rich sculptural programs are the foci of several studies and monographs, their martyr cycles are generally neglected; apart from stylistic ascription and partial iconographical identification, nothing has been written about them. Even in my own monograph on Saint Theobald in Thann

(1324–90), for example, I deliberately avoid discussing the martyr imagery of 1365 to 1390 since I could fit it neither into a conventional typological order (namely, the *imitatio Christi* notion considered the “guideline” for such Gothic tympana) nor into any local devotional texts and practices. My curiosity was sparked with my first attempt to analyze the cycle of the Holy Cross Minster in Schwäbisch Gmünd (ca. 1351–70), which spurred my initial reflections on issues of response and reception of violent imagery.<sup>29</sup>

I found the cycles in Schwäbisch Gmünd and Thann especially intriguing for two reasons. First, despite portraying an extreme diversity of violent imagery, they have never been subjects of scholarly study. Second, they represent very early instances of this type of depiction, which is generally considered an innovation of later panel painting from the mid-fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Moreover, whereas the later paintings focus on specific narratives, usually the spectacle of the Crucifixion or the entire vita of a specific martyr, the earlier examples in the Parler milieu—which I call the galleries of violence—lack similar structure and seem to serve other culturally specific purposes. Thus the Schwäbisch Gmünd and Thann cycles inform the initial case studies for the interpretive framework I develop for my analyses of the other works discussed in the book.

In preparation for this study, I documented the galleries of violence in words (using in situ descriptions) and images (photographs). I mapped the geographical locations involved, which were generally in the Upper and Middle Rhine regions, the only major exception being the Lower Rhine capital of Cologne. I focused on artworks designed primarily for public display, including sculpture, panel painting, and stained-glass windows. I then amended this visual catalogue with initial iconographical identifications according to the official canonized version of the *Golden Legend*.



Following these preliminary identifications, I classified the scenes into comparative iconographic tables according to several categories (media, location, type of torture, social belonging, gender). For example, in one set of tables, I compared the representation of the saints in various depictions in the same media type. I grouped all representations of certain saints in the stained-glass windows of the Freiburg-im-Breisgau Minster, circa 1270–80 (where the gallery of violence includes sixteen torment scenes); of the Stiftskirche Saint Florentius in Niederhaslach, circa 1330 (where the twelve apostle martyrs are depicted); and of Saint Dionys in Esslingen, circa 1350 (where the extensive gallery comprises twenty-four martyrdoms). This mapping also included original locations in cases of changes over time and restorations. Unfortunately, these cycles underwent alterations over the years, and their original appeal as galleries of violence cannot be fully reconstructed.<sup>30</sup> I prepared other tables that were organized across different media. In that way, I could compare the representations that were found to be in their original states. Through these doubly oriented tables, I could examine iconographic variations and deviations not only in regard to their supposed textual sources but also in terms of media, visibility, and communicability.

In the next step, I rearranged the images according to the nature of the torments, which are surprisingly diversified: crucifixion, decapitation on the chock, beheading while praying, flaying, mass murder, mastectomy, yanking of teeth, chopping of fingers, enucleating of eyes, burning at the stake, cooking in oil, cooking in hot water, forcing the drinking of molten sulfur, stoning, breaking on the wheel, dragging by horses, and killing by axe, lance, hoe, sword, and dagger, among others. These visualized torments (not the ones referred to in text, which at times differ from those represented) were then

classified according to social and gender criteria. These tables made apparent several organizing principles of the grouping of the violence galleries, principles that do not necessarily go hand in hand with the expected devotional framing and the practices of *imitatio Christi*.

I could then use these visual features as the foundation for a detailed iconographic study of the roughly forty legends that recount the same tortures featured in these galleries, based on their local Middle High German versions. Previous studies relied solely on the canonical legends and ignored local accounts and variations, which are of particular importance for the conceptualization of these galleries of violence. The most crucial source for the present study is the Middle High German *Elsässische Legenda Aurea* (*Alsatian Golden Legend*), which was widely circulated in the regions where the artworks are found, especially in Alsace, Swabia, Switzerland, and Austria. Probably compiled in Strasbourg, the oldest extant prose version of this text, dated to 1362, provided sermons and communal reading for laymen and mystics alike.<sup>31</sup> In several cases where the depicted torment did not correspond to any of the narratives in the *Alsatian Golden Legend*, I turned to other sources, especially the Dominican *Der Heiligen Leben* (The holy lives), *Prosapassional* (Prose passional), and the vernacular *Buch der Märtyrer* (Book of the martyrs). These texts, all compiled around 1400, include reports that help to elucidate the identities of the unidentified martyrs, even though they date somewhat later and originate from other German-speaking regions than the galleries under discussion.<sup>32</sup> After translating these sources into modern languages, I could detect how the text overlapped or diverged from the visual apparatus and recognize the intertwined modes of response and cultural association that were expected from contemporary devotees. By perceiving images as mediating between textual and oral traditions,<sup>33</sup> I was able to study

the galleries of violence from theological, social, historical, and theoretical perspectives, which paved the way to broader questions of reception, response, phenomenology, and—more fundamentally—the conceptualization of violence in the late medieval era. This challenging study of the primary sources and my demanding inquiry into text and image required a thorough and multifaceted methodology that laid the foundation for the investigations in this book.

Each of the chapters in this volume is triangularly oriented: each takes specific case studies as its starting point in order to illuminate the nature of the artistic representations and the visual stratagems employed. According to the specific properties of the works, I then turn to aspects of response and reception theories. Finally, each chapter goes beyond the specific works to examine the applicability and implication of the suggested interpretive framework to other images and galleries of violence.

Chapter 1 expands and elaborates on one of my previously published works—the martyr cycle of Schwäbisch Gmünd (1351–70). The earliest known gallery of violence in monumental sculpture, this portrayal offers the opportunity to reflect upon the novelty of such galleries before they become encoded in visual schema and memory. Tracing the theological, philosophical, and moral discussions that first defined notions of cruelty and violence (*violencia* / *gewalt* / *gewalte*) in the medieval period, I suggest that violence as an ethical and moral problem appears here as a subject for artistic speculation. By exploring the new concept of the body as private property, I examine the conceptualization of *gewalt* in terms of early modern selfhood and in terms of religious devotion. Sacred art dealing with these new cultural concerns of bodily integrity and its violation may project not only theological tenets but also extradevotional mentalities. Whereas most scholars have understood violence imagery

as calls to *imitatio Christi*, correlating with the high number of late medieval devotional texts that encouraged readers—and by implication viewers—to follow the suffering of Christ, I suggest a different interpretation. First, these texts were designed for a restricted interpretive community of mystics and other literates, and they might well have been irrelevant for the public at large.<sup>34</sup> Second, and more significant, the very proliferation of such manuals, visions, and other instructive texts indicates that the reception and understanding of violent imagery was so unpredictable and had so many irrepressible meanings and functions for illiterate viewers—sometimes even forming foci for lawlessness and renouncement—that responses had to be controlled, regulated, indoctrinated, and sometimes even repressed. This relationship between stricture and reality is, to some degree, still the case in modern times, where a virtual deluge of new legislation is often an indication that the situation that engenders the initiatives is out of control rather than managed. Another important divergence from *imitatio Christi* is that the Schwäbisch Gmünd cycle portrays a great diversity of torture, mutilation, and death, which differ greatly from Christ's humiliations and execution on the cross. Additionally, the most popular late medieval handbook of canon law—*Rechtssumme* by Johannes of Freiburg—specifically warns against ambiguous emulation of the Passion, which might lead one to deviate from the proper religious practices to commit false *imitatio*.<sup>35</sup> Thus I complicate the established interpretation of the galleries of violence, demonstrating that devotional practices are only one side of the story—and maybe not even the crucial one.

After considering the likelihood of violence as a subject of artistic speculation and the modes of immediate, intuitive responses to violence imagery, chapter 2 is devoted to the organizing principles of these galleries, focusing on

what is generally considered the most extensive martyr cycle—that of Thann—as an illustrative case study. For most of the examples in this book, there are no surviving records regarding the commission, local history, or devotional texts,<sup>36</sup> but the *Annales*, written during the fourteenth century by the local Franciscan brothers, offers insights into the agendas that might have animated the imagery in Thann.<sup>37</sup> When examined through the lenses of the *imitatio Christi* and conventional Christian typology, the thirty-four scenes on the west portal of the church seem to be chaotic, following no recognizable order. Even the twelve apostle martyrs do not appear together and do not constitute a group, and as if to make things even more difficult, only ten of them can be definitively identified. Were these images of violent torments randomly chosen and featured? A close analysis of the *Annales* suggests otherwise. These accounts reveal the local idea of a renewed martyrdom movement—not a spiritual one as suggested by Saint Francis but, rather, a physical one. The geographical boundaries of this renewed martyrdom movement outlined in the *Annales*, as well as its aims, categorization of torments, social affiliation, and gender classification, seem to have been the guiding principles behind the Thann martyria. Both the *Annales* and the martyria offer the local congregation teleological comfort during the turbulent times that saw savage attacks by rampant mobs of outlaws and recurrent outbreaks of epidemics.

After these two monographic case studies, chapter 3 deals with the perceptual rather than the historical framing of bodily imagination and the somaesthetic experience. I look at the discrepancies apparent in many works in various media between the represented torture and body in pain and the reported torments in the legends, while also investigating the viewers' familiarity with similar techniques in executions and interrogation connected with the public

penal system. Surprisingly, many of the images do not fit into any of these categories and thus demand that the viewers fill in the gaps in multiple imaginative and speculative ways. The springboards for the discussion are the tortures of Saint Bartholomew and Saint Catherine of Alexandria, whose recurrent representations in many works epitomize the disparity between text and image, highlighting the necessity of imagination in order to make the violence portrayed by the images tangible and comprehensible. Through the visualization of those two saints and other martyrs, I reflect upon how the torments, which according to the legends were not in fact realized, are instead visualized and imagined on the bodies of the viewers through seeing the images, and how, in turn, the imagination and bodies of the viewers are projected on the visual imagery.

The complicated issue of gender politics must have a role when discussing perceptions of the body and violence. Although this aspect has been the focus of numerous studies in late medieval art and religiosity during the last four decades at least,<sup>38</sup> it plays a nuanced role in the galleries of violence. Whereas chapter 1 stresses the gender metamorphosis that characterized not only the female martyrs (as has thus far been the only topic analyzed in this respect) but also the representation of male martyrs, in chapter 4 I consider the explosive and sensitive aspects of female sensual nakedness in martyrdom narratives, specifically the naked virgin body under threat. Seeing a beautiful, idealized female nude in religious art after a thousand years during which the only naked figures depicted in the church were those of the crucified Christ or of humanity's forefathers, Adam and Eve, must have been a shocking experience, just as the introduction of the galleries of violence themselves were.

Such representations have been widely discussed as religious pornography, as visual

rapes reflecting sadomasochist male fantasies that maintain patriarchal hegemony, while also suggesting stratified models of gender-based responses and resistance. Although I find most of this postmodern and feminist criticism apt and extremely illuminating, it still seems to me odd that such images were allowed in the church at all or that they were intended to evoke such responses. This perplexity seems to be the result of a blurring of the boundaries between the medieval perception of the erotic and the sexual in the scholarly discourse on such images. I argue that whereas the body of the female martyr was eroticized following the allegorical language and imagery of the Song of Songs and thus spiritualized—the bodies of the executioners were sexualized, that is, depicted in a loss of somatic control and aroused by lust, following the pictorial tradition of the cardinal sins—and thus “carnalized.” Hence, the eroticized and sexualized bodies offered viewers models and antimodels for their own salvation.

Chapter 5 digresses briefly from the strict conceptual framework of the study. It notes certain exceptions in order to suggest how the fragments of the violated body became reintegrated and reincarnated into a whole through the interplay of sculpture and coloration. Thus the discussion does not focus on the martyrdom and torment of the saints but rather on the artistic devices and stratagems through which the body was materialized anew; in this sense it is complementary to chapter 3 in demonstrating how artistic media evoke a wide range of somatic experiences. Although in many cases the polychromy of the sculpture has not survived, the mutual interplay between form and color was still a prime factor in image production and reception during the Middle Ages. This final chapter looks at the role of coloration, painting, and sculpture as combined media in the experience of the imagery. I suggest that while the sculpture was considered as the saint’s

body, its coloration and painting suggested its truths—namely, its *anima* and spiritual concept. Although this media interplay is important for completing the exploration into the reception and bodily understanding of many of the works discussed in this study, it is not relevant exclusively to martyr imagery. Thus I allow myself to exceed the self-imposed boundaries of this book and to discuss what for me are the most illuminating examples of medieval reincarnated and violated bodies: the Crucifixion, the *Schreinmadonna*, and the Ursula busts. The observations on the materiality of these works will enable me to reflect upon the role of color and matter in the reception of violence imagery that is discussed throughout the book.

At this point I wish to note some reservations. The objects delineated for the present study are galleries of violence: accumulated representations of various torments that were appropriated from their original, individual narrative sequences and amalgamated into series of visualizations of extreme violence. Thus although the Crucifixion of Christ and his humiliation indeed form a spectacle of punishment, Christological imagery is not a focus in this study simply because most depictions of Christ’s suffering were neither expropriated from their original narrative nor interwoven into other narratives and conceptual frameworks that undermine their original context; the Crucifixion is about the sacrifice of Christ himself.<sup>39</sup> It is also worth noting the difference between the actual act of martyrdom—after all, most martyrs were eventually beheaded—and the brutal, violent acts that preceded it, which are often confused or interchangeable concepts in scholarly discourse; in this sense, as noted above, it is difficult to conceive the violent imagery simply as Christomimesis.

Additionally, this study is not invested in violence imagery in illuminated manuscripts, although many of the observations offered here

are drawn from studies focused on individual manuscripts and in dialogue with these studies. Whereas in several isolated cases illuminations may share general visual similarities with the galleries of violence, they were nevertheless oriented toward very specific literate audiences and specific private usages and viewing conditions. Thus they reflect private devotional concerns, which may be misleading when discussing artworks designed for larger congregations. The import of the illustrations in such manuscripts was also tightly anchored in, and in dialogue with, the accompanying text, whereas the galleries of violence have much more obscure

relationships to the written word. Monumental galleries of violence had a different target audience and therefore involved other modes of visual rhetoric and communication, and it is the specifics of these phenomena that are at the core of this study. The images discussed in the following pages may push the comfort of sensation of both medieval devotees and modern spectators to their limits,<sup>40</sup> challenging their and our bodily responses to difficult visual sights. It is my hope that this study offers a better understanding of the stratified responses triggered by such violently shocking yet moving imagery.