

**APPROPRIATION, DISPLACEMENT AND GENDER THEFT: FIGURING THE
VIRGIN AND CHRIST IN MEDIEVAL CHRISTIAN ART**

by

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Abstract

The female act of childbirth was deemed grotesque and an unsuitable subject for medieval Christian art while the veneration of images of the crucified Christ's naked, ruptured, bleeding body was assiduously fostered. My dissertation interrogates the visual and textual interpretive frameworks that constructed the image of a dead, tortured, man as the mother of humankind while rendering women's childbirth invisible. Saturating medieval visual culture with crucifixes, depictions of the naked, suffering body of Christ, and in images of Christ's side wound isolated as an independent subject for veneration and depicted as preternaturally vaginal and sexual, the medieval church normalized the notion of the male body as parturitive. Striking, visceral fourteenth century frescoes of Hell are activated by a feminized Satan birthing "babies", visually articulating the church's misogynistic perception of the female body as monstrous and dangerously carnal and childbirth as ugly and grotesque. My dissertation examines how gender was manipulated in medieval Christian visual media to communicate powerful and enduring perceptions of the role of men and women, of the female and male contribution to procreation, and their contribution to the origin and existence of humankind. I argue that radical shifts in the figuring of the Virgin and Christ in the eleventh to fourteenth centuries neutered and infantilized the Virgin to construct Christ as the mother of humankind. Estranging the Virgin's and Christ's figuring in medieval art, I analyze the visual mechanisms deployed in constructing their gender – figural poses, gestures, activities, body language, clothing or state of undress, and demeanor – to explore the differences in their expressive potential, of their bodies ability to express mental, emotional, and physical states. My analysis of the shifts in the figuring of the Virgin and Christ, and the dynamic of their complex visual interrelationship, opens significant new discourses of appropriation and displacement, applying the expanding field of *spolia* to the plundering of the

Virgin's creative materiality to construct Christ as generative and maternal. My dissertation postulates that images – reinforced with the apparatus of religion, natural philosophy, medical, and art historical discourses – underpinned and sustained the displacement of female generative materiality onto Christ's male body.

Lay Summary

The primary focus of my dissertation is to interrogate the absence of women's childbirth as a subject for medieval Christian art. In the church campaign to persuade medieval audiences that a male God was the sole maker of the cosmos, women's birth work was rendered invisible. The shame associated with the sexual and reproductive female body – the necessity of concealing genitalia and childbirth – do not apply to the male body. In my analysis of images depicting Christ, the Virgin, Satan, and God the Creator, I identify the visual mechanisms mobilized to displace the visual language of female procreation onto Christ's abject, bleeding body. My dissertation argues that in every imaginable category of medieval visual media a consistent message is promulgated: God's male body is solely responsible for humankind's existence and salvation. Such is the persuasive power of images that even today art that explicitly depicts women's childbirth is contentious.

Preface

This dissertation is original, unpublished work by the author, Judy Jansen.

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Dedication

I dedicate my dissertation to my beloved husband, Donald Dunbar, with my gratitude for his unwavering encouragement, support, patience, and love.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Art historical literature is surprisingly silent on the invisibility of women's childbirth as a subject for medieval Christian art. Art historians appear to accept the explanation that childbirth is invisible because the medieval mind perceived childbirth labour as "an act of the female body that in Western culture has been deemed ugly and grotesque, hardly a suitable subject for Christian art."¹ This quote from Amy Neff is cited by Elina Gertsman as the reason that "[m]edieval images of Mary giving birth are almost nonexistent."² Neff and Gertsman's explanation for the invisibility of images of childbirth labour appears at first to be founded on the premise that the ugly and grotesque were unsuitable subjects for medieval art. Yet, medieval art teems with grotesquerie. Neff's explanation contains the key to the invisibility of childbirth: it is because childbirth is an act of the *female* body. My dissertation interrogates the visual and textual interpretive frameworks that deemed women's childbirth an unsuitable subject for medieval Christian art while fostering the veneration of the naked, ruptured, bleeding body of the crucified Christ.

The paradigmatic female and male bodies in Christian art are those of the Virgin and Christ. Innumerable images of the Virgin and Christ, normalized over millennia, freighted with multi-valent religious, symbolic, devotional, and iconographic values are rarely interrogated in their relation to each other. My dissertation estranges the Virgin's and Christ's bodies to analyze the

¹ Neff, Amy. "The Pain of Compassio: Mary's Labor at the Foot of the Cross." *The Art Bulletin*, 1998, Vol. 80 (2), p. 254.

² Gertsman, Elina. *Worlds Within: Opening the Medieval Shrine Madonna*, University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015, p. 62.

visual mechanisms deployed in constructing their gender – figural poses, gestures, activities, body language, clothing or state of undress, and demeanor. I will explore the differences in their expressive potential; of their bodies’ ability to powerfully communicate mental, emotional, and physical states; of their ability to convey lived bodily experience. In medieval Christian art iconography is a persuasive communicative visual tool and I chart how it was deployed to construct gender. In addition to my analysis of visual media I also examine the interpretive frameworks deployed in contemporaneous texts, sermons, devotional practices, and rituals, to determine how they shaped and reinforced medieval audiences’ reception of the female and male bodies.

My analysis of the representation of the Virgin and Christ in medieval Christian art examines the genres visually or conceptually related to procreation, childbirth, and generative materiality – *Byzantine Nativities*, *post-Birgittine Nativities*, *Satan Birthing the Damned in Hell*, *Christus Patiens*, *The Isolated Side-wound*, *Lo Spasimo*, the Virgin’s “second childbirth labour on Cavalry,” the *Incredulity of Thomas*, *St. Francis Receiving the Stigmata*, *The Incredulity of Salome*, *God the Creator* and the *Virgin Enthroned*. Chronologically my analysis begins with the Virgin’s representation in eleventh century Byzantine *Nativities* situating the post-partum Virgin and the neonate Christ in the fertile recesses of a cave.

My methodological approach to the construction of gender in medieval Christian art is informed by models utilized in feminist scholarship’s examination of the asymmetric artistic handling of the female and male body and the gendered narratives inhering in artistic focus, poses, and gestures. I am particularly indebted to Nanette Salomon’s pioneering intervention in traditional art history’s discourse on the classical female nude. Salomon estranged the classical nude’s

pudica pose – the modest gesture of the hand covering her pubis – normalized and rendered invisible through endless repetitions. Examining the differences in the artistic handling of the male and female figural forms Salomon exposed the set of power relations underpinning the historical trope of the *pudica*, a trope going back to Classical Greek art. Further, Salomon called out art history’s failure to interrogate the political significance of the female form being defined by her external sexuality.³

Usually ignored or overlooked, medieval visual culture is permeated with metaphorical vaginal and womb iconography – *vesica piscis*, mandorla, pubic triangles, uterine waters in fonts, cave mouths, hell mouths, the Virgin’s blood red travelling bed, Christ’s side wound, and womb/orbs. In art historical literature the *vesica piscis*, mandorla, Christ’s side wound, and many other almond shaped objects are described as vaginal in their form. Anatomically the term “vagina” specifically refers to the birth canal. It is the vulva – labia, clitoris, and the opening to the vagina – that is more accurately the almond shape of what has been referred to as the vaginal form in iconography. However, an art historical tradition of referring to these almond shaped objects as vaginal already exists and to avoid confusion my dissertation utilizes the term vagina instead of vulva. As Emma E.L. Rees has observed, the term vagina is commonly used as a kind of shorthand for women’s genitals and to ensure continuity in art historical discourse I use the term

³ Salomon, Nanette. “Making a World of Difference: Gender, asymmetry, and the Greek nude” in *Naked Truths Women, sexuality, and gender in classical art and archeology*. Koloski-Ostrow, Ann Olga and Lyons, Claire L, [Eds.] London and New York: Routledge, 2004 edition, pp. 197 – 219; Salomon, Nanette. “The Venus Pudica: Uncovering Art History’s ‘Hidden Agendas’ and Pernicious Pedigrees in Griselda Pollock [ed] *Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts. Feminist Readings*, London: Routledge, 1996, pp. 69 – 87.

vagina as a metonym for female genitalia.⁴ My dissertation analyzes the ubiquity of these vaginal and womb forms and their mobilization in Christian medieval visual culture as a potent sign of the parturitive body.

Although the asymmetrical artistic handling of classical female and male nudes has been subjected to extensive scrutiny, a rigorous examination of the artistic handling of the Virgin's and Christ's bodies in medieval Christian art, and the comparison of their representation with one another, has not been extensively examined in art historical discourses. My dissertation contributes to medieval scholarship in its pointed interrogation of the medieval visual strategies deployed in gendering the Virgin and Christ. I argue that there was a radical shift in the representation of the bodies of the Virgin and Christ from the eleventh to the fourteenth century. My research adds to an existing body of scholarship concerning Christ's pictorial effeminization in the thirteenth century.⁵ The concomitant neutering and infantilizing of the Virgin's body is, I believe, an analysis missing in existing art historical discourses. Examining these shifts in the Virgin's and Christ's visual representation – and their interrelationship – I contribute a significant new discourse of appropriation and displacement. In post-Birgittine *Nativities* that adopted an iconography based on the visions of the fourteenth century Swedish saint, St. Birgitta, the Virgin's generative materiality was erased as Christ's body was constructed as parturitive. My analysis of the visual mechanisms involved in gender construction complements existing scholarship on the church's deployment of sermons, texts, devotional practices, and

⁴ Rees, Emma E.L. *The Vagina: A Literary and Cultural History*. New York and London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015, p. 7.

⁵ For the scholarship on Christ's pictorial effeminization in the thirteenth century see Chapter 3 below.

rituals to manipulate perceptions and emotions of congregants. In this regard I am particularly indebted to Sara Lipton's scholarship on the church's deployment of the textual trope of "The Sweet Lean of His Head" and on Caroline Walker Bynum's research on the church use of maternal metaphors to construct Christ as "Jesus our Mother."⁶ My analysis of the devotional images of Christ's isolated side wound tipped vertically expands the potential of the field of *spolia* studies. In art historical contexts the term *spolia* means more than the booty of war; it is the often violent, translation, reuse and incorporation of materials into a culturally or chronologically different setting. In images of *Christus Patiens* – the suffering Christ – the Virgin's unseen but inferred vagina is plundered and displayed on Christ's torso. Further, as I will show, depictions of *God the Creator* can be productively understood in the context of *spolia*: I argue that the Virgin's womb, absconded and displayed on God's lap as a visual analogue for the cosmos, constructs God as the sole creator of the universe.

The primary focus of my dissertation is the concealment of the Virgin's body and birth work in its relation to the exhibition of Christ's naked, ruptured, bleeding, abject body. My dissertation postulates that the female body was concealed, female birth work was rendered invisible, and female generative iconography was manipulated in order to naturalize the neutering of the Virgin and the construction of Christ as the mother of humankind. Further, the Virgin's concealed but implicit female generativity was plundered to be displayed on Christ's body as his bleeding side wound. Supporting and sustaining the naturalization of this visual inversion of procreative roles, the church deployed a campaign of texts, sermons, devotional practices, and rituals tutoring

⁶ Lipton, Sara. "The Sweet Lean of His Head: Writing about Looking at the Crucifix in the High Middle Ages." *Speculum*, 2005, Vol. 80 (4), pp. 1172 – 1208; Bynum, Caroline Walker. *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages*, University of California Press, 1982.

congregants to venerate Christ's wounds. At the same time that the church urged congregants to venerate Christ's leaking, bloody, abject body as the mother of humankind it exhibited hostility to actual women and mothers. The church perception of women's childbirth as ugly and grotesque was based on its view that women's bodies were repugnant and dangerously carnal. My dissertation examines how gender was manipulated in medieval Christian visual culture to communicate powerful and enduring perceptions of the role of women and men, of the female and male contribution to procreation, and their contribution to the origin and existence of humankind. My dissertation postulates that images – together with the apparatus of religion, natural philosophy, medical, and art historical discourses – sustained and reinforced the naturalization of this inversion of gendered biological roles.

My investigation of the representation of childbirth in medieval art begins with a remarkable eleventh century image of the Byzantine Virgin of the Nativity situating the birth of Christ in a cave. Drawing on a diverse body of Byzantine, Christian, medieval and Mariological scholarship my dissertation develops a historiography of the figuring of the Virgin in Nativities from the eleventh to the fourteenth century.⁷ The complex visual language of Byzantine Nativities incorporate mythic cave imagery, pagan sexual symbols, vaginal symbols of pre-Christian goddess worship, ancient mythical themes including the *vagina dentata*, and the visual translation of homilies of the church fathers. In these images a mature and solemn Virgin, reclining on a blood red vaginal-shaped pallet guarding the entrance to the cave, is figured as a powerful maternal force. These Nativities also depict a scene without textual precedent –

⁷ For the scholarship on the symbolic visual language in Byzantine Nativities see Chapter 2.

midwives bathing the neonate Christ in a baptismal-like font. In this detail a midwife pulls the neonate Christ out of a watery opening; a brilliant deconstruction of the very processes not represented in Christian art: childbirth and delivery. The visual language deployed in Byzantine Nativities acknowledges the Virgin's role as procreator and protector of the neonate Christ.

The visual language encoded in Byzantine Nativities was transformed in the fourteenth century by the visions of St. Birgitta. My analysis of the Virgin's transformation in post-Birgittine Nativities is indebted to Marina Warner's scholarship detailing the church's intense focus on distinguishing every aspect of the Virgin from ordinary women.⁸ The post-partum recumbent Byzantine Virgin's exhaustion and dishevelment aligned her too closely with actual post-partum women. St. Birgitta's vision radically transformed the Byzantine Virgin from mature woman to premenarcheal girl. Among the first paintings to translate St. Birgitta's visions into art are those of Niccolò di Tommaso. St. Birgitta's vision, emphasizing Christ's birth as painless and instantaneous, erases the encoded visual language that made correspondences between the Virgin and pagan mother goddesses. Byzantine Nativities' rich visual vocabulary of female fertility acknowledging the effortful, bloody struggle of childbirth and delivery is effaced. St. Birgitta's vision of the Virgin giving birth in an instant while kneeling in prayer drained the once formidable guardian of the cave of her maternal power. I argue that the iconographic shift of post-Birgittine Nativities should be understood within the context of the church's altered position on the Immaculate Conception. The fourteenth century Franciscans embraced the theological invention that the conception of the Virgin Mary was achieved without coitus – an Immaculate

⁸ Warner, Marina. *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary*. New York: Vintage Books a division of Random House, 1983.

Conception – that she was, therefore, without original sin. The Virgin’s purity, modesty, freedom from sex and pain, and her freedom from original sin, are visualized in di Tommasso’s slender, girl/child clothed in immaculate white. The Virgin of post-Birgittine Nativities is disassociated from her own birth work and from the female condition.

To interrogate the explanation that women’s childbirth was invisible in Christian medieval art because it was perceived as ugly and grotesque, I examine Giotto’s, Buffalmacco’s and di Bartolo’s fourteenth century frescoes. Their depictions of hell are activated by a disturbing vision of childbirth as monstrous. At hell’s center a feminized Satan with hairy breasts and pubis posed in an archetypal birth squat pushes a baby out of her vagina onto a dung pile of excreted human bodies. Satan’s pose visualizes Augustine’s view of women: “...in the feces and urine” of childbirth “the closeness of woman to all that is vile, lowly, corruptible and material was epitomized.”⁹ I consider Satan’s child birthing in the caves of hell in its visual relation to the Byzantine Nativities. Satan presiding over the caves of hell – the monstrous mother devouring her young – inverts the Byzantine Virgin presiding over the cave of the Nativity – the virtuous mother protecting her son. Further, the strikingly phantasmagorical hell of Giotto’s Arena Chapel, nourished by the bloody red rivers of a monstrous menstrual flow is an apocalyptic vision of the hidden, secret, dangerous interiors of female sexual and reproductive systems. As medieval scholars have observed, the church perceived the female body as ugly, grotesque, repugnant, and menstrual blood was viewed as toxic.¹⁰ Giotto’s, Buffalmacco’s and di Bartolo’s

⁹ Augustine quoted in Warner, [n. 8], p. 57.

¹⁰ Miles, Margaret. *Carnal Knowing: Female Nakedness and Religious Meaning in the Christian West*, New York: Vintage Books, 1991, p. 153; Pseudo-Albertus Magnus. *Women’s Secrets: a*

frescoes of Satan visually articulate and reinforce the church's misogynistic perception of women as monstrous and dangerously carnal, and childbirth as ugly and grotesque.

Satan's monstrous body is not the only site of appropriation and displacement of women's childbirth. As references to the Virgin's childbirth were erased in the post-Birgittine Nativities of the Latin West her generative materiality was increasingly inscribed on images of *Christus Patiens*. In the mid-thirteenth century *Christus Triumphans* – triumphant over death, standing erect before the cross – was transformed into *Christus Patiens*, the suffering Christ: a dead, bleeding figure dangling from the cross. As medieval scholars have shown, Christ's visual transformation was accompanied by an obsessive textual and devotional focus on Christ's suffering during the Passion.¹¹ In sermons, texts, devotional practices, and images, the church ascribed parturient valences to Christ's skin, wounds, blood, and pain. Medieval audiences were encouraged to see, touch, kiss, and meditate upon Christ's wounds; nourishing an intimate engagement with Christ's body. Without the church's carefully calibrated interpretive framework medieval audiences would have found *Christus Patiens*' naked, ruptured, bleeding body repugnant.¹²

Translation of Pseudo Albertus Magnus's *De Secretis Mulierum* with Commentaries. Lemay, Helen Rodnite [Trans], Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992, p. 75.

¹¹ Aers, David. "Figuring Forth the Body of Christ: Devotion and Politics." *Essays in Medieval Studies* 11, p. 1; Smith Susan L. "The Bride Stripped Bare: A Rare Type of the Disrobing of Christ." *Gesta*, 1995, Vol. 34, (2), p. 129.

¹² Derbes, Anne. *Picturing the Passion in Late Medieval Italy, Narrative Painting, Franciscan Ideologies and the Levant*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 64.

Giotto's Arena Chapel fresco of the *Nativity* and his *Christus Patiens* – painted at the same time for the same medieval audience – by the same hand – affords a productive opportunity to analyze his handling of the Virgin's and Christ's bodies. Although the Virgin has just given birth she is fully dressed; wiped clean of birthing fluids; composed, spotless, and neatly groomed – her experience of pregnancy, childbirth, and delivery finds no somatic register. *Christus Patiens* is slumped on the cross, his head lolling to one side, eyes closed, ruptured and bleeding, his knees drawn up in a contraction of pain. Blood and water, birthing fluids, spurt from Christ's side wound. Displaying the visual indicia of childbirth and delivery, *Christus Patiens* abjection is modelled on a woman in labour. To Caroline Walker Bynum's textual research on the use of maternal metaphors by the church to construct Christ as "Jesus our Mother," and Sara Lipton's scholarship on the church's manipulation of medieval audiences' initial response of repugnance to *Christus Patiens*, I contribute my examination of the visual dynamic between the erasure of the Virgin's generative materiality and the pictorial effeminization of Christ. Remarkably, in illuminations of Christ giving birth from his side wound in thirteenth century *Bibles Moralisesées*, the metaphorical "Jesus our Mother" finds literal visual expression.

Christ's side wound isolated as an independent subject for veneration, rubricated, tilted vertically, is – as has been observed by Martha Easton and Flora Lewis – preternaturally vaginal and sexual.¹³ Beholders, instructed to meditate upon images of the side wound, understood it to

¹³ Easton, Martha. "The Wound of Christ, the Mouth of Hell: Appropriations and Inversions of Female Anatomy in the Later Middle Ages." *The Making and Meaning of Illuminated Medieval & Renaissance Manuscripts, Art & Architecture*. L'Engle, Susan and Guest, Gerald B. [Eds], Harvey Miller Publishers, pp. 396 – 397; Lewis, Flora. "The Wound in Christ's Side and the Instruments of the Passion: Gendered Experience and Response." *Women and the Book Assessing Visual Evidence*. Smith, Lesley and Taylor, Jane H.M. [Eds] London: The British Library, 1997, p. 215.

be the precise size of Christ's actual wound and to possess supernatural, apotropaic powers. Activated by prayer and by kissing, images of the side wound demanded an intimate, embodied, interactive relationship with the viewer. Until very recently, an absence of discourses concerning images of an erotic or sexual nature created omissions in art historical literature. My contribution to scholarship on Christ's side wound is informed by a recently discovered painting on the verso of a fourteenth century traditional iconic portrait by Pietro di Niccolo da Orvieto of the *Virgin and Child*. Pietro di Niccolo's cosmic, side wound explodes the visual categories developed in my dissertation – womb, mandorla, vagina, wound, mouth, cave, Hell, and cosmos. The collision of an archaizing double portrait of the Virgin and Child with a modern abstract expressionist, painterly depiction of Christ's cosmic wound breaks open new discourses. The magnetic pull of Pietro di Niccolo's vertiginously abstract side wound calls up discourses on the relation between materiality, optical properties, and spiritual engagement. The mesmerizing optical properties of side wound images facilitated their function as sites of meditation and spiritual union. I am indebted to Georges Didi-Huberman's scholarship on the medieval imaginary's understanding of the material properties of vivid abstractions and precious materials to activate a transcendental spiritual engagement with the image.¹⁴

The extremity of Pietro di Niccolo's juxtaposition of a demure Virgin and Child and his incandescent wound sparks connections between different genres and media. Condensed, tightly framed for display, Pietro di Niccolo's elliptical side wound is an anamorphosis expanding to portray Christ as the entire cosmos. Coupling a hieratic Virgin on one side and the blazing

¹⁴ Didi-Huberman, Georges. *Fra Angelico: Dissemblance and Figuration*. Todd, Jane Marie [Trans], Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995.

wound on the other opens a discourse beyond appropriation and displacement, most productively considered within the context of the expanding field of *spolia* which has recently developed to include notions of appropriation, displacement, identity and gender theft.¹⁵ As referenced above, my analysis of the plundering of the Virgin's material creativity to construct Christ as the mother of humankind contributes to the field of *spolia* scholarship. *Spolia*'s very nature is to produce a rending or void in the object's original context. The appropriation of the visual language of female procreation, its displacement onto Christ's male body and Satan's monstrous one, creates an absence in the visual record: the invisibility of women's childbirth; an invisibility that extended until late into the twentieth century.

In a chapter exploring the limited expressive potential of the Virgin in comparison with Christ, I examine the Benedictines', Dominicans', and Franciscans' invention of the notion of the Virgin's "second childbirth labour" on Calvary. In images of *Lo Spasimo*, the Virgin's swoon on Calvary, the church manipulated the Virgin's depiction to enhance its own role in salvation.¹⁶ The church's decision to introduce depictions of a Virgin swooning with grief, a depiction that contradicts the Biblical account, demonstrates that the Virgin could suffer pain to a degree and in a manner deemed appropriate by the church when it suited their purpose. The traditional art historical interpretation of the Virgin's swoon in paintings such as Rogier van der Weyden's

¹⁵ Flood, Finnbar Barry. "Appropriation as Displacement." Brilliant, Richard and Kinney, Dale [Eds] *Reuse Value Spolia and Appropriation in Art and Architecture from Constantine to Sherrie Levine*. London: Routledge, 2011 ebook 2016, and Brilliant, Richard "Authenticity and Alienation" in Brilliant and Kinney, *Ibid*, p. 168.

¹⁶ Neff, [n.1], p. 262; Hamburg, Harvey E. "The Problem of *Lo Spasimo* of the Virgin in Cinquecento Paintings of the Descent of the Cross." *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, [1981], Vol. 12 [4], p. 51.

Descent from the Cross, claims that there is an exact parallel between Christ's dead body and the Virgin's swooning one. My visual analysis of Rogier's juxtaposition of the Virgin's gracefully swooning, fully clothed body with Christ's dead, naked, bleeding, collapsing body, argues the opposite. In an image intending to visually represent the Virgin's "second childbirth labour" on Calvary the Virgin mimes the male body's enactment of childbirth labour. The Virgin's swooning body obscured under her clothes is a feeble imitation of Christ's unbearably visceral, bloody, bodily collapse.

The Virgin's limited power of visual expression is brought into sharp focus by what I term the visual tradition of bodily verification. St. Thomas, absent at the first appearance of the resurrected Christ, disbelieves the Apostles' eyewitness accounts demanding proof from the resurrected Christ. The subject of Duccio's *Incredulity of Thomas* offers artists an irresistible opportunity to thematize the nature of faith, and the role of vision, touch, and physical phenomenon as evidence. Images of St. Francis's stigmata also participate in the tradition of bodily verification. In Giotto's fresco *The Funeral and Lamentation of St. Francis* the doubting knight Jerome's fingers penetrate disturbingly deeply into St. Francis's side wound. My dissertation contrasts images of doubting Thomas and doubting Jerome with those of doubting Salome. Salome, according to the apocryphal gospels, is a skeptical midwife attending at the Nativity who doubts a virgin can give birth. Attempting to satisfy her incredulity by examining the Virgin's postpartum vagina, Salome is immediately punished by divine intervention. The ability to verify the miracle of Christ's birth is prevented by gender. Christ and St. Francis disrobe to expose their bodies and wounds to vision and touch. The Virgin's fully clothed body does not articulate knowledge to sight nor to touch. Further, Salome's female curiosity is an offence requiring severe punishment. My comparison of images of the *Incredulity of St. Thomas*

and St. Francis's doubting Jerome with images of the Virgin's Doubting Salome contribute to a discourse on the limited expressive potential available to the highly regulated female body. The Virgin, denied the pictorial tradition of bodily verification, cannot visually articulate her lived bodily experience. Physical phenomenon as visual and haptic evidence – proof of the existence of miraculous events inscribed on the body – are unavailable to the female body.

Frontispieces of *God the Creator*, an image that visualizes God as the sole creator of the universe initiate the visual programs of thirteenth century *Bibles Moralisées*. God is depicted in the act of penetrating an inchoate mass at the centre of a womb-like orb with the arm of a compass. God's creation of the universe is depicted in *medias res*, thrusting the viewer into the unfolding action. I compare the artistic handling of *God the Creator* enthroned with Giotto's *Virgin Enthroned*. My comparison develops the theme of the Virgin's containability and passivity in contrast to God the Creator's uncontainability, activity, and creativity. The Virgin sits passively displaying her infant son, her womb invisible, her creative materiality concealed. God the Creator strains in his seat, his womb/orb exteriorized, visible, transparent, and parturient; he is in the act of inducing his cosmic labour with the arm of his compass. God the Creator grips in his hand the technologies required to create the universe. Like Pietro di Niccolo's blazing cosmic side wound, images of *God the Creator* anatomize the womb/orb as a visual analogue for the cosmos. My contribution to the scholarship on depictions of *God the Creator* is to consider how these images visually articulate classical, antique, and medieval theories of the male and female contribution to procreation. Aristotle's causative theory of procreation – adopted by medieval and early modern religion, medicine, and natural philosophy – understood the womb to function as a mere container. For Aristotle the male was the effective and active principle of procreation; the female the passive and receptive. Male semen activated female matter producing the fetus's form and

defining character. This male/form, female/matter paradigm applied not only to human reproduction but also to the creative artistic process. Aristotle's ontological model of procreation adopted as a model for artistic conception meant that only males had the creative power of *inventio*: the ability to reshape imperfect matter into ideal form.¹⁷ As Carolyn Korsmeyer observes, the gendering of the concept of the artist has an ancient history.¹⁸ Equally ancient is the male appropriation of the language of gestation and parturition to describe male artistic creativity. The concept that the male was the active and effective cause of procreation is visually articulated in the depiction of the *Virgin Enthroned* and *God the Creator*. Embedded in medieval visual culture, the concept of the passive, inactive female body and the active, creative male body has enjoyed an enduring afterlife. *God the Creator's* womb/orb dispossesses the Virgin of her womb just as *Christus Patiens* "birth-giving" side wound appropriates the Virgin's vagina.¹⁹ Concealed in depictions of a woman's body because women were considered dangerous and carnal, the vagina and womb are transformed into powerful signs of generation and creativity when displaced onto the male body. The shame associated with the sexual and reproductive female body – the necessity of concealing genitalia and childbirth – do not apply to the male body.

God the Creator's womb/orb constitutes a perfect circle. As will emerge in Chapter six of my dissertation, in medieval cosmological theories and diagrams the circle was the ideal vehicle for

¹⁷ Jacobs, Fredrika H. "Women's Capacity to Create: The Unusual Case of Sofonisba Anguissola" *Renaissance Quarterly*, 1994, Vol. 47 (1).

¹⁸ Korsmeyer, Carolyn. *Gender and Aesthetics An Introduction*. New York and London: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2004, p. 14.

¹⁹ "birth-giving wound" is from Gertsman, [n. 2], p. 87.

visually expressing creation. In circular diagrams, *rotae*, in monumental *mappae mundi*, and T-O maps; circular diagrams conveyed complex spatial and temporal relationships and recorded information about the *oikoumene* – the known world. Some medieval maps superimpose a depiction of the circular world with an image of God’s body: the male body is visualized as both the genesis of the world and coeval with it. My dissertation asserts that in every imaginable category of medieval visual media – *mappae mundi*, *rotae*, psalter illustration, illuminations, frontispieces, woodcuts, prints, miniatures, diagrams, altarpieces, paintings, frescoes and the crucifixes suspended from every altar – a consistent message is promulgated: God’s male body is solely responsible for humankind’s existence and salvation. In its exegesis, texts, sermons, devotional practices, and rituals the church fostered and sustained the interpretive frameworks constructing the image of a dead, ruptured, bleeding man as the mother of humankind.

In the church campaign to persuade medieval audiences that a male God was the sole maker of the cosmos, women’s birth work was rendered invisible. In medieval Christian visual culture, the Virgin’s body was concealed, and she was divorced from her birth work. To represent the Virgin as modest and virtuous, her body was concealed conveying a powerful message that the female body was shameful. At the same time the church tutored medieval audiences to venerate Christ’s exposed, ruptured, bloody body. Ubiquitous, revered, endlessly repeated, visible on every altarpiece and domestic shrine and therefore naturalized, these images taught the beholder that the male body was generative and salvific. Such is the persuasive power of images that even today art that explicitly depicts women’s childbirth is unfamiliar and therefore contentious. Until recently, art history’s failure to interrogate the absence of women’s childbirth as a subject for art sustained the fiction that it was not a suitable subject for art.

Chapter 2: The Virgin in The Cave

2.1 The Recumbent Virgin, the Fissured Cave, the Blood Red Pallet, The Baptismal Font and the Midwives

According to the Gospel of Luke, in compliance with Caesar Augustus' decree, Joseph travelled to Bethlehem with the pregnant Virgin to be enrolled in the Roman census.²⁰ As Joseph and the Virgin approach Bethlehem the narrative of the Apocryphal Gospel, the *Book of James*, diverges from the Gospel of Luke adding tantalizing details such as caves and midwives. In the *Book of James* the Virgin goes into labor before reaching Bethlehem and Joseph is forced to seek out a cave where she can deliver her child. Joseph then rushes off in search of midwives to assist with the Virgin's childbirth.²¹ As Joseph and one of the midwives look into the cave a dazzling light appears and as the light withdraws, transforming the immaterial into the material, Christ is born.²² *The Book of James* is the likely source of the compelling Byzantine images depicting the *Nativity* in the dark, fertile recesses of a cave²³. Images that situate the *Nativity* in a cave often include scenes related to Christ's birth – the journey of the Virgin and Joseph to Bethlehem; the

²⁰ Coogan, Michael D. [Ed] *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, New Revised Standard Version, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, Gospel of Luke 2:1 – 5, pp. 98 – 99.

²¹ James, Montague Rhodes. *The Apocryphal New Testament*, "The Book of James or Protevangelium." Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924, p. 46.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

Magi led by a star; the Annunciation to the Shepherds; and two midwives bathing the neonate Christ.²⁴

One of the most complex, intense, vividly associative Nativities in a cave is *Scenes of the Nativity* [Figure 1] likely painted in Constantinople in the eleventh century, and part of the treasured collection of the Monastery of Saint Catherine in the Sinai.²⁵ The image is structured by a continuous path winding up a rugged mountainside through a series of switchbacks. The *Nativity* scene, at the mountain's apex, depicts a semi-recumbent Virgin before a jagged, black, cave mouth. The pictorial convention of the reclining Virgin began after the Council of Ephesus's decree in 431 reaffirming Christ's divine birth.²⁶ Prior to the Council of Ephesus *Nativities* depicted the seated Virgin holding the infant Christ in her lap.²⁷ To counter the heretical claim that Christ was not the son of God the Council of Ephesus elevated the Virgin's status from *Christotokos*, the bearer of God to the *Theotokos*, the Mother of God.²⁸ The shift in the Virgin's bodily attitude in depictions of the *Nativity* from sitting to reclining is an early example of the church's doctrinal decisions affecting pictorial representation.

²⁴ St. Clair, Archer. "Narrative and Exegesis in the Exodus Illustrations of the San Paolo Bible: Aspects of Byzantine Influence." *Byzantine East, Latin West Art-Historical Studies in Honor of Kurt Weitzmann*. Mouriki, Doula et al [Eds.], Princeton: Princeton University, 1995, p. 196.

²⁵ Peers, Glenn, "Scenes of the Nativity" in Nelson [n. 6], p. 155.

²⁶ Tradigo, Alfredo. *Icons and Saints of the Eastern Orthodox Church*. Sartarelli, Stephen [Trans] Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2006, p. 105.

²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 105.

²⁸ Murray, Peter and Murray, Linda. *The Oxford Companion to Christian Art and Architecture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 164, 288, and 521.

In the Sinai *Nativity* the Virgin's recumbent body, physically contiguous with the cave, completes the cave mouth's morphology [Figure 2]. The Virgin's recent childbirth labor is expressed in her bodily attitude – reclining, knees drawn up and apart, her maphorion in disarray – and in the color of her travelling bed, or pallet. The Virgin's pallet – blood red and vaginal in shape – suggests the blood that is shed during childbirth. The Sinai *Nativity* is structured around a series of polyvalent ancient symbols of the vagina. The Virgin's blood red pallet is the shape of the pre-Christian symbol for the vagina, the *vesica piscis*. Writing in 1869 Thomas Inman expressed the view that Christianity's appropriation of such ancient sexual symbolism was “blasphemous and heathenish.”²⁹ Nonetheless, Inman acknowledged that the vaginal shape of the *vesica piscis* was ubiquitous in all visual cultures and that it operated as a kind of amulet.³⁰ Inman observes: “...[A] sight of the *yoni* [the Sanskrit term for the vagina][was considered] a source of health, and a charm against evil spirits; however grotesque the idea may be, it has existed in all ages and in civilized and savage nations alike.”³¹ Anne Ross comments upon the widespread practice in pagan Celtic culture of exposing the male or female genitalia as a “powerful apotropaic gesture.”³² Scholars affirm Inman's reluctant acknowledgement that the *vesica piscis* is a recurring, persistent, and universal symbol in both pre-Christian and post-

²⁹ Inman, Thomas. *Ancient Pagan and Christian Symbolism Exposed and Explained*. Leeds: Celephais Press, first published 1869, 2004 Edition, p. 101.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Ross, Anne. *The Pagan Celts, London: Basford*, 1986, p. 142.

Christian art.³³ Thus, among its other operations the Virgin's red *vesica piscis*-shaped pallet had an apotropaic function – warding off evil spirits.

Another vaginal symbol in the Sinai *Nativity* is the dramatically ruptured cave mouth, a *vagina dentata*, or “vagina with teeth,” a pervasive and ancient mythical theme based upon the primal male fear of castration during the act of coitus.³⁴ The hidden, interior nature of female sexual and reproductive organs, perceived by men as mysterious and threatening, gave rise to the fear of woman as “devourer.”³⁵ As scholars have observed the Judeo-Christian tradition is steeped in the ancient fear of women.³⁶ The ancient myth of the *vagina dentata* entered into the Judeo-Christian literary tradition in the third century BCE *Book of Tobit*, an apocryphal book of the Hebrew Bible. The *Book of Tobit* recounts the story of Tobias' journey to Media to collect his patrimony and marry his kinswoman, Sarah. Unfortunately for Sarah and her seven betrotheds each time one of her previous husbands attempted to consummate the marriage he died. On the journey to Media, Tobias, accompanied by the archangel Raphael in disguise, is fishing in the Tigris River when he is attacked by a fish that attempts to devour him. Following Raphael's advice Tobias extracts the fish's organs for later use in repelling the “demon” possessing Sarah. The shape of

³³ Naumburg, Margaret. “Art as Symbolic Speech.” *The Journal of Aesthetics & Art Criticism*. 1955, Vol. 13 (3), p. 437; Pearson, E. Ann. “Revealing and Concealing: The Persistence of Vaginal Iconography in Medieval Imagery: The Mandorla, The Vesica Piscis, The Rose, Sheela-Na-Gigs and the Double-Tailed Mermaid.” Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Ottawa, 2002, p. 80.

³⁴ Rait, Jill. “The ‘Vagina Dentata’ and the ‘Immaculatus Uterus Divini Fontis.’” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*. 1980, Vol. 48 (3), p. 416.

³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 422.

³⁶ Warner, [n. 8], p. 237; Russell, J. B. *Witchcraft in the Middle Ages*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1972, p. 283; Rait, [n. 34], p. 422.

the fish bladder, *vesica piscis*, as noted above, was itself a widespread symbol of the vagina and was deployed to repel Sarah's "demon" *vagina dentata*. Following Raphael's instructions Tobias burns the fish organs, Sarah's "demon" is repelled, and the marriage of Sarah and Tobias is successfully consummated [*Book of Tobit*, 6:1 – 8:14].³⁷ The subject of *Tobias and the Angel*, in which Tobias is depicted on his journey to Media with the Archangel at his side and the fish dangling from a string on his arm became very popular in fifteenth century Italy.³⁸

As one further explores the St. Catherine *Nativity*, one notes that the Virgin's maphorion is pulled open, exposing an undergarment forming a grey triangle beneath her knees. This pubic triangle, also an ancient symbol of the vagina, was inscribed on cult statues of goddesses from as early as the Paleolithic.³⁹ The triangular vulvas of many goddess statues are engraved with rippling lines, just like the flowing lines on the Virgin's grey undergarment, suggesting uterine waters.⁴⁰ In the Sinai *Nativity* in the scene below the flowing lines of the Virgin's grey undergarment the neonate Christ is bathed in a baptismal font by two midwives [Figure 3]. The baptismal font, a symbol of the womb, operates on a number of registers in this *Nativity* image. As an *immaculatus uterus divini fontis* [immaculate womb of the divine font], the font's transparent waters and interior stages an opposition to the hidden interior of the *vagina dentata*.

³⁷ Coogan, [n. 20], *Apocrypha*, pp. 20 – 23.

³⁸ Dunkerton, Jill et al., *Giotto to Durer, Early Renaissance Painting in the National Gallery*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991, p. 314; Murray and Murray, *Companion*, n. [28], pp. 534 – 535.

³⁹ Baring, Anne and Cashford, Jules. *The Myth of the Goddess: Evolution of an Image*. London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1993, pp. 11 – 12.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

The font is the divine non-devouring vagina.⁴¹ Presiding over this symbolic landscape and its palette of black, blood red, and earth tones, the Virgin is constructed as a pagan mother goddess resting after childbirth. The long association between mother goddesses and caves going back to “...the memories of the cosmological foundations of all the great religions of the Semitic world...” clothe the Virgin with a supernatural, chthonic, power.⁴² Situating the Virgin’s childbirth labor in a cave gave the birth an ancient cultic resonance: equating the birth of Christ with the origins of the world. The liminal, mythic, spatiality of the cave removed the Virgin and Christ from secular, quotidian space into an otherworldly realm. Associated with origins, genesis, fertility, and female genitalia the cave, a *locus profundis*, is an ideal womb symbol. The Virgin’s semi-recumbent posture, a bare foot protruding from her maphorion, her knees drawn up and apart exposing her greyish undergarment, and the spreading red beneath her, suggest the effortful, bloody struggle of childbirth. The creases in the Virgin’s triangle shaped undergarment, reminiscent of the vulvas inscribed on ancient goddesses, suggest water flowing and pooling onto the pallet, evoking the gush of uterine waters at labour’s onset. Beneath the Virgin the lobed font contains the infant Christ partially immersed in fluid, supported by a midwife. Neither the New Testament nor the Apocryphal books are a source for this scene of Christ bathed by the midwives, and its origins are a mystery.⁴³ P. J. Nordhagen suggests that the

⁴¹ Rait, [n. 34], p. 415; Pearson, [n. 33], pp. 48 – 49.

⁴² Rowland Jr., Benjamin. “A Nativity Panel with a Note on the Iconography of the Cave.” *Bulletin of the Fogg Art Museum*, 1939, Vol. 8(2), p. 63.

⁴³ Arad, Lily. “The Bathing of the Infant Jesus In the Jordan River and His Baptism in a Font: A mutual Iconographic Borrowing in Medieval Art. *Miscellanea Liturgica Catalana*, 2003, p. 22.

midwife bathing scene replaced a little-known earlier Salome motif.⁴⁴ Salome, one of two midwives attending at Christ's birth according to the *Book of James*, and skeptical that a virgin could bear a child, attempted to physically examine the Virgin and was swiftly punished by divine intervention.⁴⁵ Nordhagen's suggestion that the doubting Salome motif was replaced because of its "crudeness" will be considered in the context of my analysis of images of doubting Thomas and doubting Jerome in Chapter 5.⁴⁶

Here I would like to stress that the baptismal like font's proximity to the post-partum Virgin is similar to the connection Augustine makes in his influential 5th century treatises which link the waters expelled from the Virgin's womb at the onset of labor, and baptismal water: "Vulva matris, aqua Baptismatis" [Womb of the Mother: Baptismal water].⁴⁷ Leo the Great reinforced Augustine's conceit in his *Nativitate Domini*:

Terra enim carnis humanae, quae in primo fuerat praevaricatore maledicta, in hoc solo beatae virginis partu germen edidit benedictum, et a vitio suae stirpis alienum. Cujus spiritalem originem in regeneratione quisque consequitur; et omni homini renascenti aqua baptismatis instar est uteri virginalis, eodem Spiritu sancto replente fontem, qui replevit et virginem; ut peccatum quod ibi vacuavit sacra conceptio, hic mystica tollat ablution

[The water of the baptism is an image of the virginal womb, whereby the same Holy Spirit that impregnated the Virgin impregnates the font. Just as the sacred conception casts out sin in that place, so here mystic ablution takes it away. The same kind of origin which He took on in the womb of the Virgin, [h]e has placed in the fountain of the baptism.]⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Nordhagen, Per Jonas. *Studies in Byzantine and Early Medieval Painting*. London: The Pindar Press, 1990, p. 326.

⁴⁵ James, M. R. [n. 21], pp. 46 – 47.

⁴⁶ Nordhagen, [n. 44], p. 326.

⁴⁷ Augustini Opera Omnia, Patrologiae Latina, Sermo, 119, 4 [PL 38, 674 D].

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p. 31.

The Sinai *Nativity's* complex coded visual language incorporates vaginal symbols of pre-Christian goddess worship, ancient mythical themes such as the *vagina dentata*, ideas found in the homilies of the Fathers of the Church – Augustine and Leo – while at the same time deconstructing the processes involved in childbirth. The Virgin's reclining bodily attitude with her knees drawn up and parted, clothes in disarray, the flowing of uterine waters and the pooling of blood red beneath her – invoke childbirth. In the midwife scene Christ is pulled from the womb/font enacting delivery. These scenes are among the most expressive images exteriorizing the processes of childbirth in medieval art.

The Sinai *Nativity* prominently foregrounds the Virgin's body at the cave's mouth constructing her as guardian and protector of the neonate Christ. The cave's ruptured edges, the generous splashes of the color red, the deeply recessed space of the cave partially blocked by the female form, make reference to primordial, powerful, maternal forces. The positioning of the Nativity scene at the center of the mountain's apex constructs the Virgin as the progenitor of all of the related scenes. The Virgin's triangular undergarment creased with water-like waves and her role as guardian at the cave's mouth mark her as a descendant in the lineage of ancient goddesses. Surrounded by venerable coded symbols of the vagina the Sinai *Nativity's* Virgin fulfills a potent generative role. As Anne Pearson observes, when the vagina was depicted more abstractly it was “acceptable as [it] lingered below the level of conscious awareness, but [drew] power from the recollection of ancient ideas that associated women's reproductive power with the creative power of the divine.”⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Pearson, [n. 33], p. 63.

By the twelfth century scenes of the *Nativity* situating Christ's birth in a cave had infiltrated the Latin West and appeared in the mosaic programs of the Palatine Chapel, Palermo and in the Church of Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio ["the Martorana"] Palermo. By the thirteenth century examples of Christ's birth situated in a cave can be found in Central Italy in Guido di Graziano's small Sieneese panel [Figure 4] *Nativity of Christ*, part of a larger polyptych, *St. Peter Enthroned*, 1278 – 1302. This *Nativity* develops many of the same themes as its eleventh century Byzantine predecessor. A post-partum Virgin clad in black, surrounded by her *vesica piscis*-shaped red pallet, reclines at the cave's mouth. The Italian word for cave "grotta" is feminine; caves are recessed female spaces. The Italian term "val cava" defined as a "woman's private parts, a hollow cavity or valley," suggests that both visually and textually the terms *cava* or *grotta* were intimately associated with female genitalia and reproduction.⁵⁰ As noted earlier there is an ancient association between *grotta* and the female body. Once inhabited by the goddesses of ancient religions, in Italy *grotta* or caves are the sites of shrines to the Virgin connecting her body to these dark, recessed, watery spaces. From St. Birgitta's fourteenth century vision of the Virgin giving birth to Christ in a cave to Bernadette Soubirous multiple visions of the Virgin in a grotto in Lourdes, the *grotta* and cave are sites of supernatural visions of the Virgin.⁵¹

In di Graziano's *Nativity of Christ* the Virgin's childbirth labor is expressed in a condensed visual language; her gesture and the inclination of her head connect her recumbent posture with the scene below of the midwives bathing Christ. Her gesture together with the direction of the

⁵⁰ Green, Jonathon, *The Cassell Dictionary of Slang*. London: Cassell, 1998, p. 301.

⁵¹ Murray and Murray, *Oxford Dictionary of Christian Art*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, pp. 69 – 70; Warner, [n. 8], pp. 255 – 256.

Virgin's gaze invite the viewer to witness the re-enactment of Christ's delivery. Christ, assisted by the kneeling midwife, is "born" from the font/womb. The scene of the midwives bathing Christ visually translates Augustine's equation between uterine waters and the baptismal font: *Vulva matris, aqua Baptismatis*. In this *Nativity*, as in the *Sinai Nativity*, the cave's womb symbolism makes strong correspondences with the Virgin's post-parturient womb. The cave's jagged *vagina dentata* mouth registers the male anxiety generated by the Virgin's body and the multiple overlapping vaginal, uterine, and womb symbols deployed in these *Nativities* to convey childbirth. The cave's recesses, the blood red pallet, and the midwife pulling Christ from the font, are in service to visually exteriorize the processes involved in childbirth labor and delivery. However, the *Sinai Nativity's* dynamic tensions created by the deeply ruptured cave mouth, the jagged landscape, and the Virgin's solemn presence, are tempered here. The *Siena Nativity's* cave mouth is smoother, its interior shallower, the Virgin less disheveled, and lacking the pubic triangle. This is a tamer version of the ancient goddess, her vestigial powers diminished.

An exquisite, richly iconographic, portable domestic painting of the *Nativity* [Figure 5] in the collection of the Greek Institute in Venice dating from the second half of the fifteenth century, like the *Sinai Nativity*, deploys the mountain's topography to structure its individual but connected scenes in a continuous pictorial narrative. Scholars have concluded from its diminutive size and the lengthy Greek inscription on its verso that it was a private devotional image.⁵² The reclining Virgin guarding the cave's entrance is the *Venice Nativity's* fulcrum. The

⁵² Evseyeva, Lilia. "Greek Icons After the Fall of Byzantium" in Evseyeva, Lilia et al. [Eds], *A History of Icon Painting*. Cook, Kate, [Trans] Moscow, 2005, p. 105. The Venetian *Nativity*, one of four similar icons with a common structure and iconography whose provenance can be traced to Venice and are thought to have a common model that is now lost.

painting's other scenes – the Magi led by a star, the Annunciation to the Shepherds, the Shepherds attendance at Christ's birth, and the Midwives bathing Christ, revolve around the Virgin. The cave in this *Nativity* opens like a rupture in a fault line revealing the neonate Christ, swaddled within a tomb-like manger and adored by a highly refined depiction of a naturalistic ox and ass. The semi-recumbent Virgin's red pallet contrasts with the radiant white book-like stone slab beneath her. The Virgin's wine-colored mantle opens at her waist revealing a grey/blue tunic highlighted to emphasize her abdomen and bent thigh. The fabric on the Virgin's thigh and below her knees is creased with lines that, like the Sinai *Nativity*, suggest the flow of uterine waters.

The Virgin's pallet is shaped, as it is in the Sinai and Siena *Nativities*, in the form of the ancient *vesica piscis*, a visual analogue for the Virgin's vagina, its blood red the color of generation and birth. The stone slab under the Virgin's body recalls the typological relation between Moses' exodus story and the Virgin and Joseph's journey toward Bethlehem in Medieval exegesis.⁵³

Inhering in the motif is the supersession of the Mosaic tablets by the *logos*, the word made flesh. In each of the *Nativities* situated in a cave, the dark recesses of its interior are penetrated by radiant light signifying the transformation of the immaterial word into material flesh.

Juxtaposing the Virgin and the book-like stone slab as *logos* the icon activates multiple iconographic registers – the equation between the Virgin and the mountain, the maternal body and the *logos*, and the Virgin's purity and white marble.⁵⁴

⁵³ St. Clair, [n. 24], p. 196.

⁵⁴ Pentcheva, Bissera. "Visual Textuality: The "Logos" as Pregnant Body and Building." *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, 2004, No. 45, p. 230.

The Virgin's bodily attitude, her gesturing left hand, the cant of her hips, the direction of her gaze, lead the viewer's eye to the scene below inviting the viewer to witness the midwives' activity. The midwife standing on the left bends forward pouring a serpentine stream of dark liquid from an elegant jug into a baptismal-like font. The scene engages with the Augustinian notion of *Vulva matris, acqua Baptismatis*, the presence of the sacred spirit in the Virgin's uterine waters and the Church's baptismal waters.⁵⁵ The seated midwife, wearing a red garment, holds the neonate Christ as if she has just delivered him from the womb-like font. The wine-colored liquid, the chalice-like font, and the infant Christ's flesh construct a Eucharistic reference in this enactment of childbirth.

The legibility of the encoded visual language of these *Nativities* for their Byzantine and Western audiences is articulated in a striking image of the sixth century Byzantine poet, Romanos the Melodist [Figure 6]. The image, from a calendar book known as the *Menologion* of Emperor Basil II [976 – 1025],⁵⁶ deliberately quotes two essential elements from the *Nativities* situated in a cave – the Virgin's reclining bodily attitude, and the *vesica piscis* shape and color of the Virgin's pallet. In the legend of Romanos the Melodist the Virgin visits the sleeping poet in a dream, feeds him a piece of parchment containing the words of a hymn, and he wakes to recite a hymn celebrating Christ's birth.⁵⁷ Bissera Pentcheva discusses the significance of the image's visual vocabulary:

⁵⁵ Arad, [n. 43], p. 31.

⁵⁶ Pentcheva, [n. 54], p. 232.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p. 232.

The physical aspects of incarnation and childbirth are expressed in the red cloth on which Romanos lies, the scroll placed in his mouth, and the position of his body which alludes to the image of the *Theotokos* in the standard Nativity scenes.⁵⁸

The shape of Romanos' pallet, its layered labia-like folds, and its blood red color are strongly vaginal. The artist's quotation of the Virgin's reclining body on a red pallet to articulate the poet's artistic process in composing his hymn illustrate that this iconography was understood as visual shorthand for creative generative powers. However, this image alters the recumbent body's spatial relation with the cave depicted in the Sinai, Siena, and Venice *Nativities*. The image of *Romanos the Melodist* stages an opposition between the church and cave. Depending on the context, the Virgin is figured as the embodiment of baptismal fonts, churches, mountains, and caves. The *Romanos* image aligns the poet, the red pallet, the scroll, and the Virgin with the church. The church claims the red pallet's generative associations with ancient goddesses and with the poet's creative powers. The cave's constellation of associations in the Sinai *Nativity* – *vagina dentata*, the cave as cosmological foundations of religion, dwelling place of goddesses, womb, origins, and genesis are effaced in the *Romanos* image – the cave is dark, empty and barren.

From at least the eleventh to the fifteenth century the prominence of the Virgin in depictions of the nativity in a cave, her spatial relation to figures and scenes, construct her as the pivotal figure. These images utilize a highly coded, deconstructed pictorial language to visualize the Virgin's childbirth labor and delivery. As earlier indicated, there is no Biblical or apocryphal basis for the scene of the midwives bathing Christ in a baptismal-like font. The scene is a brilliant visual intervention incorporating Augustine's and Leo the Great's equation of the

⁵⁸ Pentcheva, [n. 54], p. 232.

Virgin's womb and baptismal waters. The number of extant images of the Nativity in a cave in multiple media, their widespread circulation in the eastern Mediterranean, throughout Italy, and their continued presence in the Eastern Church's icon making practice to the present day, attest to their resonance with their audiences. As Lilia Evseyeva observes, the theme of the Nativity continued to be represented in the same fashion in Byzantine art with little change.⁵⁹ However, in the West depictions of the Nativity were transformed:

...the Western prettifying interpretation of the theme, which assumes a single earth space as the place of action for the event, leaves no room for its polysemantic and spatially cosmic Byzantine treatment.⁶⁰

2.2 St. Birgitta's Vision – The Kneeling Virgin and the Painless, Instantaneous Birth

This transformation of the Byzantine *Nativity* can be traced to the fourteenth century visions of St. Birgitta. After the death of her husband, St. Birgitta, a Swedish aristocrat, became a Franciscan tertiary, founded the order of the Holy Savior in Sweden, and travelled on pilgrimages to Spain, Rome, and Jerusalem.⁶¹ St. Birgitta claimed to have visions in which Christ and the Virgin recounted to her their experiences of the Nativity and the Passion.⁶² St. Birgitta's account of her visions, which were contemporaneously recorded and eventually published as *Revelations*, are understood by scholars of art history and religion to have profoundly influenced

⁵⁹ Evseyeva, [n. 52], p. 105.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Giorgi, Rosa, *Saints*. New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc., 2006, p. 434.

⁶² Murray, Peter and Murray, [n. 28], pp. 69 – 70.

Christian iconography.⁶³ The translation of St. Birgitta's visions into visual art Christianized and sanitized the Virgin's powerful, pagan associations with the cave in the Byzantine model of the Nativity. The church enthusiastically promoted St. Birgitta's visions as divinely inspired and, unlike visions that did not meet with church approval, they appeared in late medieval visual culture with surprising speed.⁶⁴

Although Birgitta's vision of the birth of Christ still situated the Virgin in a cave, every other aspect of the Byzantine *Nativity* is transformed. St. Birgitta's account of her vision of this event emphasized the supernatural nature of the Virgin's childbirth:

When I was present by the manger of the Lord in Bethlehem...I beheld a virgin of extreme beauty...well wrapped in a white mantle and a delicate tunic, through which I clearly perceived her virgin body...Then the virgin pulled off the shoes from her feet, drew off the white mantle, that enveloped her, removed the veil from her head, laying it by her side, thus remaining in her tunic alone with her beautiful golden hair falling loosely down her shoulders. ... And when all was thus prepared, the virgin knelt down with great veneration in an attitude of prayer, and her back was turned to the manger, but her face lifted to heaven, toward the east. Thus with her hands extended and her eyes fixed on the sky she was [kneeling] as in ecstasy, lost in contemplation, in a rapture of divine sweetness...I saw the child in her womb move and suddenly in a moment she gave birth to her son, from

⁶³ Schiller, Gertrud. *Iconography of Christian Art: The Passion of Jesus Christ*. Vol 2. Lund Humphries Publishers, 1972, pp. 76 – 78; Warner, [n. 8], p. 185; Murray and Murray, [n. 28], p. 70; Schleif, Corine. "Christ Bared Problems of Viewing and Powers of Exposing." *The Meanings of Nudity in Medieval Art*. Lindquist, Sherry C.M. [Ed.] London and New York: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2012; Hull, Vida. "The Sex of the Savior in Renaissance Art." *The Revelations of Saint Bridget and the Nude Christ Child in Renaissance Art*. *Studies in Iconography*, 1993, Vol. 15.

⁶⁴ Poley, Eyal and Light, Laura [Eds] *Form and Function in the Late Medieval Bible*, Leiden and Boston: Brill Books, 2013 (see FN 12, p. 383 for a list of paintings that incorporate the essential features of St. Birgitta's vision; i.e., a kneeling Virgin and a neonate Christ lying on the ground radiating light).

whom radiated such an ineffable light and splendor...I saw the glorious infant lying on the ground naked and shining....⁶⁵

St. Birgitta's vision of the Virgin's childbirth emphasizes its painlessness and instantaneity. As Vida Hull observes: "Theologically, Bridget's vision of the Nativity affirmed the supernatural nature of the child and his method of birth, leaving no doubt that God had taken on flesh and that his mother remained a virgin, physically intact even after childbirth."⁶⁶ St. Birgitta's vision occurred in 1372 and was translated into visual art even before her *Revelations* were published.⁶⁷ Her vision reinforced interpretations of the *Nativity* in other contemporary texts acceptable to the church such as the *Meditationes Vitae Christi* and Ludolf of Saxony's *Life of Christ*.⁶⁸ The older interpretation held by the church that Christ's birth was painful was repugnant to the Cistercian St. Bernard of Clairvaux and the Franciscan St. Bonaventura who, like St. Birgitta, interpreted Christ's birth as a painless, divine mystery.⁶⁹

Prior to St. Birgitta's account of her vision, image-makers generally depicted the birth of Christ in one of two ways. As in the Byzantine model of the Sinai, Siena, and Venice *Nativities*, the reclining post-partum Virgin positioned at the cave's entrance protecting the neonate Christ. Or, as in innumerable *Adorations*, the Virgin, seated on a chair or stool, displayed the neonate Christ

⁶⁵ Searby, Denis. *The Revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden*, Vol. 3: *Liber Caelestis*, Books VI – VII. Morris, Brenda. Introduction and Notes. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, pp. 250 – 251.

⁶⁶ Hull, [n. 63], p. 79.

⁶⁷ Murray and Murray, [n. 28], p. 70.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Kup, Karl. "An Early Example of St. Birgitta's Influence on the Iconography of the Nativity." *Bulletin of the New York Public Library*. December 1957, Vol. 61 (120), p. 584.

on her lap to the Magi and/or the shepherds who in turn, acknowledged his divinity by kneeling before him. St. Birgitta's vision of the Virgin giving birth to Christ painlessly and instantaneously inspired a new genre of painting, *The Adoration of the Child*, in which the Virgin kneels in prayer before a naked, radiant Christ. The Virgin's posture of kneeling before her son in *Nativities* and *Adorations* appears to have originated with St. Birgitta.⁷⁰ St. Birgitta's vision of the Virgin's hair "falling loosely down her shoulders" altered the Virgin's formerly matronly appearance. Only "maidens," young, unmarried girls wore their hair loose and uncovered.⁷¹ The rapid appearance, popularity, and proliferation of images of a slender Virgin with golden hair, more angel than woman, kneeling before the neonate Christ, suggest how St. Birgitta's reformulation resonated with the church's views of the Nativity and the appropriate manner of representing the Virgin.

One of the earliest translations of St. Birgitta's vision into a painting is Niccolò Di Tommaso's *Adoration of the Child* [Figure 7].⁷² To the right of the cave's entrance St. Birgitta kneels telling the beads of her rosary as the vision of the *Adoration* materializes before her. Di Tommaso's inclusion of Birgitta receiving her vision in his paintings of the *Adoration of the Child* assisted in

⁷⁰ Murray and Murray, [n. 28], p. 70.

⁷¹ Buffer, Thomas and Horner, Bruce. "The Art of the Immaculate Conception." *Marian Studies, The Immaculate Conception: Calling and Destiny*, 2004, Vol. 55, p. 195.

⁷²Based upon Di Tommaso's inclusion of St. Bridget's figure in three of his extant works some commentators suggest that St. Birgitta and Di Tommaso may have been in Naples at the same time, Di Tommaso was in Naples to produce paintings for his Neapolitan patrons and St. Birgitta resided in Naples on at least three occasions [1365 – 67; 1371 – 1373]. Strehlke, Carl Brandon. *Italian Paintings 1250 – 1450. John G. Johnson Collection and the Philadelphia Museum of Art*. Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004, pp. 342 – 345. See also Kup, [n. 69], p. 584.

substantiating St. Birgitta's visions as divinely inspired, fostering the saint's cult, and supporting her canonization.⁷³ The text uttered by the Virgin in di Tommaso's painting *Bene Veneris Deus Meus, Filius Meus, Dominus Meus* [Welcome my God, my Lord, my son] are the words St. Birgitta received in her vision and recorded in her *Revelations*.⁷⁴ Di Tommaso translates St. Birgitta's vision of the cave into a marvelous, jewel-like, luminous golden brown interior space, its entrance although rocky is fashioned into steps rather than ruptures. This cave mouth is the anti-*vagina dentata* – its golden mouth “de-toothed” – its visually accessible interior inviting rather than foreboding.⁷⁵ Di Tommaso eschews the Sinai *Nativity's* vivid, intense pallet in favor of warm golds, browns, white, and rose tones. Inside the cave, echoing its morphology, glowing golden forms replace the Virgin's red pallet and surround her body and that of the neonate Christ. These glowing forms are no longer the *vesica piscis* invoking the power of ancient goddesses instead they are the thoroughly Christianized mandorla bathing the Virgin, Christ, and the cave's interior in rich golden light. The mandorla, the Italian word for almond, is “an upright almond-shaped glory, or aureole, enclosing a figure.”⁷⁶ Ann Pearson suggests that it is the fear of the sign for the vagina as the *vesica piscis* that transformed it into the Christianized and non-

⁷³ Hull, [n. 63], p. 79; Nordenfalk, Carl. “Saint Bridget of Sweden as Represented in Illuminated Manuscripts.” *De Artibus Opuscula XL Essays in Honor of Erwin Panofsky*, ed. Meiss, Milliard, Zurich, 1960, 1:376.

⁷⁴ Kup, [n. 69], p. 583

⁷⁵ Additional Di Tommaso paintings of St. Bridget's vision, with St. Bridget depicted in the lower right corner receiving her visions are found in the center panel of a triptych, originally in Florence, now in the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and the Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven.

⁷⁶ Murray and Murray, [28], p. 300.

threatening mandorla.⁷⁷ The term *vesica piscis*, its ancient association with the vagina, the notion that the name originated because of the fishy smell of women's genitals, was an anathema for nineteenth century male art historians and archeologists such as Adolphe Napoléon Didron who believed the term should be "expunged."⁷⁸ Pearson suggests that the Christian term mandorla was preferred as it hid the sexual symbolism and the pre-Christian origins of the *vesica piscis*.⁷⁹

Di Tommaso deploys the mandorla's form and its radiating glow to illuminate the cave's formerly dark, mysterious recesses. The correspondences fostered in the Sinai, Siena, and Venice *Nativities* between the cave, the womb, and procreation are radically altered in the post-Birgittine iconography. The Virgin's body is no longer contiguous with the cave mouth's morphology. The Virgin's red pallet formerly supporting her semi-recumbent post-partum body is gone, its only remnant a crumpled red maphorion lying discarded at her feet. In di Tommaso's *Adoration* the Virgin's youth and obedience are foregrounded rather than her role as procreator and protector. In accordance with St. Birgitta's vision instead of resting after childbirth the Virgin is kneeling to venerate the infant Christ. Her body, childlike and slender, desexualized and infantilized, bears no trace of parturition. The once formidable guardian of the cave mouth – protective, solemn, olive skinned, clad in black, is transformed into an ethereal child. All references to the Virgin's

⁷⁷ Pearson, [n. 33], p. 48.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, p. 80. As Ann Pearson notes Didron's view was presumably shared by his contemporaries since although the *vesica piscis* is ubiquitous in medieval iconography it is rarely mentioned in the art historical literature. It is worth noting that the *Oxford Companion to Christian Art and Architecture* defines the term *vesica piscis* as the Latin word for fish bladder and equates it with the mandorla but does not reference its pre-Christian origins, Pearson, [n. 33]. Nor does the *Companion's* definition of "mandorla" refer the reader to the pre-Christian term *vesica piscis*, Murray and Murray, [n. 28], p. 558.

⁷⁹ Pearson, [n. 33], p. 81.

childbirth labor – recumbent posture, physical exhaustion, dishevelment, pubic triangle, uterine fluids, and blood – are erased. Christ’s relation to the cave is also transformed. Formerly tightly swaddled, lying in a tomb-like manger, elevated from the ground, Christ was protected by the Virgin at the cave’s mouth. In the post-Birgittine *Adoration* it is Christ’s naked radiant body that claims power from his connection with the cave and its mythic origins. The once reclining Virgin now kneels in the posture of a supplicant. The Virgin’s elongated body and attenuated neck emphasize her vertical distance from the cave’s earthen floor. As Simone de Beauvoir observed of the paintings that incorporate St. Birgitta’s vision of the *Adoration of the Child*:

For the first time in the history of mankind a mother kneels before her son and acknowledges, of her own free will, her inferiority. The supreme victory of masculinity is consummated in Mariology: it signifies the rehabilitation of woman through the completeness of her defeat.⁸⁰

The seductive, bedazzling, gemlike qualities of di Tommaso’s painting distract the viewer from the deep relational shifts it represents. The power dynamic between the mother and child is profoundly, perpetually altered, not only is the mother subservient to the male infant; she colludes in her own oppression. The Sinai, Siena, and Venice *Nativities* construct the Virgin as a primeval, powerful maternal force. The caves in those *Nativities*, liminal mythic spaces, removed the Virgin and Christ from secular, quotidian space into a space connected with the underworld and the otherworld. Given the church’s regulation of the Virgin’s representation it is unsurprising that an exhausted recumbent Virgin clad in black, the suggestion of a pubic triangle and uterine waters inscribed on her maphorion, surrounded by a blood red *vesica piscis*-shaped pallet,

⁸⁰ De Beauvoir, Simone. *The Second Sex*, Borde, Constance and Malovany-Chevalier, Sheila [Trans] originally published 1949, New York: Vintage Books Edition, 2011, p. 189.

situated at the mouth of a *vagina dentata*-like cave mouth, was replaced in Western Christian art. The iconography of the Sinai, Siena, and Venice *Nativities* together with the Virgin's recumbent bodily attitude acknowledged women's role in the exhausting physical struggle of bearing and nurturing children. In the Latin West St. Birgitta's vision created a proliferation of girlish Virgins attired in immaculate white, drained of their former potency, and disassociated from their own birth work. Although the Sinai, Siena, and Venice *Nativities* do not depict the birth of Christ they partially acknowledge the effort and imply the pain associated with childbirth.

Nativities deploying St. Birgitta's iconography sever the connection between the Virgin and her birth work and between her generative powers and the cave. St. Birgitta's vision also eliminated any reference to the midwives whose bathing of Christ resembles childbirth delivery and the font-like basin with its allusions to the Virgin's womb and uterine waters. St. Birgitta's vision replaced the Gospel account of the swaddled infant Christ lying in a manger [Luke 2:10-11] with a naked Christ lying on the ground radiating light.⁸¹ St. Birgitta describes the shepherds attending in Bethlehem to witness the birth of Christ. Significantly, in St. Birgitta's vision the shepherds question the Virgin about the infant's gender, and in response, the Virgin lifts the infant's blanket to show the shepherds "...the infant's male genitals."⁸² As Vida Hull has shown, following St. Birgitta's vision new subgenres of the Nativity developed. In numerous paintings the Virgin lifts the infant Christ's blanket or draperies exposing Christ's genitalia to the gaze of the shepherds, the Magi, to donors, and to the viewer.⁸³ This is what Leo Steinberg refers to

⁸¹ Searby, [n. 65], p. 251.

⁸² *Ibid*, p. 253.

⁸³ Hull, [n. 63], See Figures 1 – 23.

somewhat awkwardly as the “motif of gender determination at the Nativity,” and its connection with Steinberg’s theological interpretation of the numerous Renaissance depictions of the infant Christ’s genitalia is explored more fully in Chapter 5 of this thesis.⁸⁴

Prior to St. Birgitta’s vision, paintings of the *Nativity* in the Latin West depict a seated Virgin clad in a blue maphorion with the neonate Christ completely covered in swaddling and lying in a manger. In post-Birgittine *Nativities* such as Stephan Lochner’s *The Adoration of the Child* [Figure 8] the Virgin kneels in an attitude of prayer before her infant. The structure surrounding the infant Christ is a humble shed open to the sky, lacking in dark recesses and contrasts between dark and light, benign. The neonate Christ, lying on a cloth decorated with symbols of the cross is figured as the living host lying on an altar cloth. Lochner’s *The Adoration of the Child* and the innumerable post-Birgittine *Nativities* depict Christ’s birth as a kind of parthenogenesis – as if the radiant, naked, neonate Christ sprang miraculously fully formed from the ground – the Virgin’s role in this form of childbirth is unacknowledged. *Nativities* depicting a chthonic, generative Virgin in a cave evidence a slippage in the church’s control over the representation of the Virgin, affording a glimpse of her magnetic pagan appeal. Traces of what Henri Lefebvre describes as the Christian inheritance from Rome and antiquity, the “magico-religious...the realm of the dead, chthonian, telluric forces,”⁸⁵ are conjured in the Byzantine model of the Nativity. *Nativities* situated in a cave retain traces of the goddess, of the ancient tradition of

⁸⁴ Steinberg, Leo. *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, Second Edition, 1996, p. 645.

⁸⁵ Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. Nicholson-Smith, Donald [Trans.], Oxford UK and Cambridge US: Blackwell, 1991, p. 231.

divine female power whereas every trace of the goddess is eliminated in post-Birgittine Adorations of the Child.

As noted above the reformulation of the iconography of the Nativity reflected and gave form to a shift in the Western church's interpretation of the nature of the Virgin's birth of Christ. The church's new emphasis focused on the spiritual elements of the birth stressing its supernatural, instantaneous, and painless nature and constructing it as a divine mystery.⁸⁶ This shift in the church's interpretation of the Virgin's birth of Christ was consistent with its changing attitude to the Immaculate Conception. Early in the fourteenth century the English Franciscan John Duns Scotus's arguments in favor of the Immaculate Conception, an idea that is not found in the canonical nor apocryphal Gospels, began to influence his order and to gain traction in Italy.⁸⁷ Although the Immaculate Conception would not be proclaimed as doctrine until the nineteenth century, it was accepted and promoted by the Franciscans and others while being violently opposed by orders such as the Dominicans.⁸⁸ Scotus' views on the Immaculate Conception exerted an influence on visual culture in Padua and Florence, eventually spreading throughout Italy.⁸⁹ The dogma of the Immaculate Conception asserts that 'in the first instant of her

⁸⁶ Debby, Nirit Ben-Aryeh. "The Images of Saint Birgitta of Sweden in Santa Maria Novella in Florence." *Renaissance Studies*, 2004, Vol. 18 (4), p. 511.

⁸⁷ Erhardt, Michelle A. "The Immaculate Kiss Beneath the Golden Gate: The Influence of John Duns Scotus on Florentine Painting of the 14th Century." *Franciscan Studies*, 2008, Vol. 66, p. 269; Denny, Don. "Some Symbols in the Arena Chapel Frescoes." *Art Bulletin*, 1973, Vol. 55(2), p. 210.

⁸⁸ Debby, [n.86], p. 255.

⁸⁹ Erhardt, [n. 87], p. 269; Although the Franciscan pope Sixtus IV authorized the celebration of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception in 1476, the church's proclamation of the Immaculate Conception did not occur until December 8, 1854, Murray and Murray, [n. 28], p. 240.

conception [the Virgin Mary] was ...preserved exempt from all stain of original sin.”⁹⁰ Just as the notion of the Virgin’s childbirth being comparable to that of an ordinary woman, i.e. painful, exhausting, and bloody, was repugnant to late medieval theologians, the idea that St. Anne’s conception of the Virgin involved coitus was “something horrible for pious ears and devout souls.”⁹¹ The Eastern church took a different view of the Immaculate Conception “...while extolling [the Virgin’s] sublime purity, [the Eastern church] ascribed actual sin to [the Virgin]” rejecting the idea that she was immaculately conceived.⁹² Significantly, the Eastern church’s iconography of the Nativity was not reformulated by St. Birgitta’s vision. In the Eastern church’s depictions of the Nativity the Virgin continued to recline on her red pallet before the cave mouth protecting her tightly swaddled infant.

An early visual expression of the Immaculate Conception is Giotto’s *Meeting at the Golden Gate*, a fresco in his c. 1305 cycle in Padua’s Arena Chapel.⁹³ Giotto’s pictorial narrative of the events in the life of the Virgin’s mother and father, Joachim and Anne, and the Virgin’s infancy

⁹⁰ Murray and Murray, [n. 28], p. 240.

⁹¹ The French Franciscan Pierre Auriol of Oriol quoted in Erhardt, [n. 87], p. 273.

⁹² Warner, [n. 8], p. 244.

⁹³ Erhardt, [n. 87], p. 271; But see Murray and Murray who identify a 1492 painting of Carlo Crivelli’s incorporating a scroll inscribed with words from Ecclesiasticus [24:14] as the earliest known depiction of the Immaculate Conception, [n.28], p. 239. For a summary of the historiography of the artistic representation of the Immaculate Conception from the eleventh century to its standardized iconography in the seventeenth century see Buffer and Horner [n. 71]; and see D’Ancona, Mirella Levi, *The Iconography of the Immaculate Conception in the Middle Ages and Early Renaissance*. College Art Association of America and Art Bulletin, 1957.

became immensely popular subjects in fourteenth century Italian visual culture.⁹⁴ Giotto's *Meeting at the Golden Gate* depicts the Virgin's aged parents, Joachim and Anne, embracing before the Golden Gate, following the announcement to them by angels that Anne would finally bear a child. Joachim and Anne's tender embrace was a visual translation of the Immaculists' belief that the Virgin was supernaturally conceived.⁹⁵ Giotto's *Meeting Before the Golden Gate* "... visually reinforced the idea that Mary's conception took place without coitus."⁹⁶ The Immaculate Conception distinguished the Virgin from all other humans who, in the church's view, were contaminated by original sin.⁹⁷ As Marina Warner observes:

...every facet of the Virgin had been systematically developed to diminish, not increase, her likeness to the female condition. Her freedom from sex, painful delivery, age, death, and all sin exalted her *ipso facto* above ordinary women and showed them up as inferior.⁹⁸

The Franciscan promotion of the Immaculate Conception in the fourteenth century with its emphasis on the supernatural conception of the Virgin were compatible with St. Birgitta's vision of the Virgin's supernatural childbirth and clashed with the Byzantine model of the *Nativity*. A womanly, exhausted, recumbent, disheveled, postpartum Virgin too closely resembled the physical attitude of actual post-partum women. An emphasis on the miraculous, the spirituality of the divine mystery, inhered in depictions of the Immaculate Conception and in St. Birgitta's

⁹⁴ Erhardt, [n. 87], p. 269.

⁹⁵ Erhardt, [n. 87], p. 274.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.* This approach to depicting the Immaculate Conception fell out of favour and was banned by Pope Innocent XI in 1677, Buffer and Horner, [n. 71], p. 189.

⁹⁷ Warner, [n.8], p. 241.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 153.

vision of the Nativity. The Byzantine model of the Nativity, on the other hand, focused on the Virgin's corporeality. While the Byzantine model of the *Nativity* continued to flourish in the East, after St. Birgitta's vision it waned in the West.⁹⁹

A network of associations connected St. Birgitta's vision of the Nativity and the Franciscans' adoption of the Immaculate Conception. St. Birgitta was affiliated with the Franciscan order as a tertiary and the timing of her vision follows the Franciscan adoption and promotion of the Immaculate Conception. St. Birgitta had multiple links with the city of Florence, the epicenter of the production of early images of both the Immaculate Conception and of St. Birgitta's vision of the *Nativity*.¹⁰⁰ St. Birgitta visited Florence where she had many prominent friends, where a double Birgittine monastery was founded and where the Franciscans promoted Birgitta's cult and lobbied for her canonization.¹⁰¹ Further, di Tommaso the painter of at least three depictions of St. Birgitta's vision of the Nativity was a Florentine, St. Birgitta's *Revelations* were translated into Italian, and there are extant copies of her *Revelations* in Tuscan archives.¹⁰² The supernatural conception of the Virgin as envisioned in the Immaculate Conception is in perfect harmony with

⁹⁹ Evseyeva, [n. 52], p. 105.

¹⁰⁰ There are three fresco cycles including the depiction of the *Meeting at the Golden Gate* in Florence's Santa Croce alone, Erhardt, [n. 87], p. 280; a Brigittine Nativity decorates Florence's Santa Maria Novella's entrance wall and a relief by Filippo Brunelleschi adorns its pulpit, di Tommaso's early Brigittine Nativities likely produced in Florence now held in other collections include a triptych in the collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and Figure 7, *The Adoration of the Child* in the Vatican Pinocoteca. For other early examples see Henrick Cornell, "The Iconography of the Nativity of Christ," Uppsala, 1924.

¹⁰¹ Debby, [n. 86], pp. 509 – 512, 516.

¹⁰² *Ibid*, pp. 509 – 512.

St. Birgitta's vision of the *Nativity*. The Franciscan's adoption of the Immaculate Conception and St. Birgitta's vision of the Nativity contributed to the demise of the Byzantine model of the Nativity in the West.¹⁰³ It was not until the seventeenth century that Spanish artists perfected the visual expression of the Immaculate Conception. In his text *El Arte de la Pintura* Francesco Pacheco, the Spanish painter, and the Inquisition's art censor, codified the orthodox iconography for representing the Immaculate Conception. Pacheco's concept of the correct representation of depicting the Immaculate Conception was based upon an amalgam of scriptural references to the Apocalyptic Woman from the Gospel of John and the type of the "*tota pulchra*" from the Song of Songs, the beautiful beloved without stain.¹⁰⁴ The Virgin of the Immaculate Conception was to be painted as a girl of twelve or thirteen with loose hair falling over her shoulders "...in the flower of her youth."¹⁰⁵ In other words, according to Pacheco's iconography, the Virgin should be figured not just as a young girl but as a prepubescent child incapable of conception. Di Tommaso's Virgin's slender, sexless, childlike body, arrayed in a white tunic, kneeling in the posture of prayer, surrounded by radiant golden light, anticipates Pacheco's instructions for

¹⁰³ Di Tommaso's connections to Florence indicate he was a member of Florence's *Arte dei Medici Speciali* around 1346 Skaug, Erling. "Niccolo di Tommaso of Florene, St. Bridget's of Sweden's First Painter." *Acta ad archaeologiam et atrium historium pertineta*, 2004, Vol. 18, pp. 289 – 321. The Santa Maria Novella fresco considered to be the first illustration of St. Bridget's vision is attributed to di Tommaso by Kup, Karl. "St. Birgitta Nativity." *Philadelphia Museum of Art Bulletin*, 1959 – 1960, Vol. 55, 263/264, p. 15 however, see Debby [n. 86] for a discussion of an alternate attribution footnote 12, p. 513.

¹⁰⁴ Buffer and Horner, [n. 71], pp. 192 – 194.

¹⁰⁵ I thank my thesis supervisor Joseph Monteyne for drawing Francesco Pacheco's *El Arte de la Pintura* to my attention, Pacheco is quoted in Murray and Murray [n. 28], p. 241; and see Buffer and Horner, [n. 71] pp. 192 – 195, for the scriptural references to the Apocalyptic Woman and the Song of Songs.

painting the immaculate Virgin. The theological invention of the Immaculate Conception was designed to “accord Mary honor by identifying and celebrating her privileges.”¹⁰⁶ The “privilege” granted by figuring the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception was her exemption from the female condition.

¹⁰⁶ Buffer and Horner, [n.71], p. 185.

Chapter 3: Art History's Exclusions and Gaps – The Artistic Handling of the Virgin's and Christ's Bodies

3.1 Satan's Monstrous Childbirth in Hell

Although Christ's birth is celebrated in innumerable paintings of *The Nativity*, *The Adoration of the Child*, and the *Virgin Enthroned*, the Virgin is always depicted post-partum, cleansed of birthing fluids, and fully clothed. The visual indicia of childbirth – bare skin, bodily contractions, rupturing, the shedding of water and blood – are suppressed. The Virgin's labour is invisible in medieval Christian art and the exclusion of women's pregnant bodies and their childbirth was invisible in art until late in the twentieth century.¹⁰⁷ Art history has failed to interrogate this absence. Scholars appear to accept the explanation that childbirth labor is invisible in medieval art because the medieval mind perceived childbirth labor as “an act of the female body that in Western culture has been deemed ugly and grotesque, hardly a suitable subject for Christian art.”¹⁰⁸ This quote from Amy Neff is cited by Elina Gertsman, as the reason that “[m]edieval images of Mary giving birth are almost nonexistent.”¹⁰⁹ Neff's and Gertsman's explanation for the invisibility of images of the Virgin's childbirth appears to be founded on the premise that the ugly and grotesque were unsuitable subjects for medieval Christian art. Yet, as noted in the

¹⁰⁷ Although there is a Madonna type of the pregnant Virgin, *Madonna del Parto* or *Madonna Expectans*, the Virgin's body is fully clothed and her pregnancy is signaled by the pictorial convention of her loosened stays. An example is Piero della Francesca's *Madonna del Parto* c. 1460, Monterchi, Tuscany. For a brief historiography of the visual representation of the pregnant body and the first artist to depict a pregnant body from a women's point of view as opposed to portraying a pregnant woman as a self-reflexive portrait of the male artist's artistic creativity, see Higgonet Anne. “Making Babies, Painting Bodies Women, Art, and Paula Modersohn-Becker's Productivity.” *Woman's Art Journal*, 2009, Vol. 30 (2), pp. 15 – 21.

¹⁰⁸ Neff, [n. 1], p. 254.

¹⁰⁹ Gertsman, [n. 2], p. 62.

Introduction, this same art teems with grotesquerie. Giotto's depiction of hell in the Arena Chapel's *Last Judgment* is both an example of the ugly and grotesque and a disturbing vision of childbirth as monstrous [Figure 9]. Describing Giotto's Satan in the Arena Chapel Ann Derbes and Mark Sandona observe: "Satan's bloated belly ...seems a kind of perverse evocation of pregnancy...[s]till more explicit is the sinner emerging headfirst from between Satan's legs in an infernal parody of childbirth..."¹¹⁰ [Figure 10]. Among the many striking late medieval frescoes depicting the *Last Judgment*, Giotto's, considered the most significant of the fourteenth century, is hallucinatory.¹¹¹ High on the Arena Chapel's internal west wall Christ sits in judgment surrounded by a huge feathered, scaled, rainbowed, red encircled mandorla [Figure 11]. Even more singular than the mandorla's emphasis on its own materiality are the torrents of blood flowing from its bottom edge, separating into four bloody rivers, a perversion of the four crystalline rivers of Paradise, as it gushes into the caverns of Hell [Figure 12].¹¹² Dante, Giotto's contemporary and fellow Florentine, also incorporated the notion of a bloody river into his vision of Hell. In Dante's *Inferno* the Phlegethon, a mythical river of Hades, bubbles with hot blood:

But now look to the vale, for we draw near
The river of blood, where all those wretches boil

¹¹⁰ Derbes, Anne, and Mark Sandona. "Barren Metal and the Fruitful Womb: The Program of Giotto's Arena Chapel in Padua." *The Art Bulletin* 80.2 (1998), p. 285.

¹¹¹ Link, Luther. *The Devil: The Archfiend in Art from the Sixth to the Sixteenth Century*. New York: Harry n. Abrams, 1996, p. 134.

¹¹² Traditionally art historians have described the red streams flowing from Christ sitting in Judgment as rivers of fire see Zuffi, Stefano, *Giotto: The Scrovegni Chapel*, Milan: Skira Editore S.p.A., 2012, p. 71; Lee, Raymond L. and Fraser, Alastair B. *The Rainbow Bridge: Rainbows in Art, Myth and Science*. Penn State University Press, 2001, p. 46; Bellinati, Claudio. *Giotto Iconographic Atlas of the Scrovegni Chapel [1300 – 1305]*, p. 138; Shorr, Dorothy C. "The Role of the Virgin in Giotto's Last Judgment." *The Art Bulletin*, 1956, Vol. 38 [4], p. 207.

Whose violence filled the earth with pain and fear.

...

... off we set

Along the bank of the bubbling crimson flood,
Whence the shrieks of the boiled rose shrill and desperate.¹¹³

Visiting the Arena Chapel, a viewer is immediately struck by the color and scale of this bloody river. The first indelible impression is of a monstrous bloody menstrual flow structuring and nourishing Hell's multiple cavities. Medieval authors considered menstrual blood impure, harmful and destructive.¹¹⁴ In his treatise *De secretis mulierum* Pseudo-Albertus Magnus, cautioned that menstrual blood was extremely poisonous and would wither any living thing that came into contact with it.¹¹⁵ The fact that women menstruated was regarded as evidence that they were defective, subject to foul leakages, and incapable of controlling the "workings of their own body."¹¹⁶ The medieval imaginary was obsessively preoccupied with the "contaminating and injurious effect of menstrual blood."¹¹⁷ Impure, contaminated menstrual blood, the opposite in the medieval mind of the pure clear water flowing through paradise, constitutes the crimson

¹¹³ Dante, *The Divine Comedy, Book I, Hell*. Trans, Sayers, Dorothy L. Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1949, Canto XII, lines 46 – 48, p. 143 and lines 100 – 102, page 145. In *The Oxford Companion to Christian Art and Architecture* the Murrays, [n. 28], p. 262, note that Giotto's frescoes of the Last Judgment share some of the themes that Dante expresses in the Inferno. In any event, Giotto's river can be read as both blood and fire.

¹¹⁴ Shahaar, Shulamith. "The old body in medieval culture." *Framing Medieval Bodies*, Eds. Kay, Sarah and Rubin, Miri. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994, p. 163.

¹¹⁵ Pseudo-Albertus Magnus, [n. 10], p. 75.

¹¹⁶ Groenveld, Leanne. "Letting or Leaking Blood? Christ's Wounded Masculinity." *Tessera Journals*, 2003, Vol. 33 – 34, p. 144.

¹¹⁷ Shahaar, [n. 114], p. 164.

effluent flowing through Giotto's Hell. The blood flowing from Christ's mandorla sweeps sinners into Hell cleansing the world of their presence. Malignant female menses is appropriated by Christ as an apt punishment for the eternally damned. Presiding over *Hell*, Giotto's feminized Satan with hairy breasts and pubic area, simultaneously devours a human body and gives birth. The depiction of Satan ingesting the damned appeared first in the Island of Torcello's Santa Maria Assunta Cathedral's *Last Judgment* mosaic program and, as Luther Link notes, the subject had a long after life in the Latin West's images of Hell. The depiction of Satan's "defecation of sinners," to use Link's term for Satan's birthing of the damned, began near the end of the twelfth century.¹¹⁸

As Marina Warner has observed, in visual art Satan is often depicted as a woman, and frequently as a parturient one.¹¹⁹ The pregnant female body was considered distorted and grotesque by the Fathers of the Church. Writing in the fourth century Jerome observed, "Woman with child is a revolting spectacle."¹²⁰ Margaret Miles notes that this opinion was widely shared by medieval authors.¹²¹ The stance of Giotto's Satan is an archetypal birth squat, a posture illustrated in later anatomical texts such as the fifteenth century *Fasciculus Medicinae* [Figure 13]. Medieval and early modern women often squatted or used a birthing stool in childbirth labor, utilizing gravity

¹¹⁸ Link, [n. 111,], p. 135. Note that Link and many other scholars have interpreted Satan to be engaged in an infernal cycle of devouring and defecating sinners rather than birthing them.

¹¹⁹ Warner, [n. 8], p. 58.

¹²⁰ Quoted in Miles, [n. 10], p. 153.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

to aid them in pushing their babies out of their bodies.¹²² Satan's birthing posture would have resonated with medieval female audiences who would witness Satan in a birth squat expelling the damned from "her" vagina every time they departed the chapel or cathedral. Medieval audiences were continuously confronted with an image of childbirth as grotesque, monstrous, and evil. As Barbara D. Palmer observes, "...images of evil tend to reflect their current cultural environment, its values, abuses and terrors...[and]...embody man's psychological, spiritual, and moral terrors."¹²³ Depictions of a huge, insatiable, feminized Satan, presiding over hell, devouring and birthing humans, reflect a deeply rooted fear of female sexual and reproductive power.

Satan's birth squat in the Arena Chapel was adopted by other central Italian artists in Pisa's Camposanto and in San Gimignano's Collegiata. Buonamico Buffalmacco's hell in Pisa's Camposanto [Figure 14] commissioned by the Dominican friars and frescoed c. 1338 is activated by Satan's figure. Although the fresco, now almost seven hundred years old, has suffered substantial paint loss and discoloration, even today its Satan is almost unbearably visceral. It is hard to overestimate the affect Buonamico's terrifying Satan would have had on its medieval audiences. Huge, with red veins dangling from its frontal mouth Satan macerates a human body with the teeth protruding from a smaller but prominent face growing out of the left side of the beast's head. The head, shoulders, and one arm of a human body struggle to escape while caught

¹²² Caviness, Madeline H. "Obscenity and Alterity: Images That Shock and Offend Us/Them, Now/Then." Ziolkowski, Jan M. [Ed] *Obscenity: Social Control and Artistic Creation in the European Middle Ages*. Leiden: Brill, 1998, p. 162.

¹²³ Palmer, Barbara D. "The Inhabitants of Hell: Devils." Davidson, Clifford and Seiler, Thomas H. [Eds] *The Iconography of Hell*. Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1992, p. 20.

between its sharp teeth. A cavity in Satan's abdomen, a crater-like vagina/mouth, enmeshed with a tangled web of bloody veins, provides visual access into Satan's bloody uterus where bodies spin and writhe, wrestling for space. An angry red, vaginal opening between Satan's legs spews bloody strands of tissue, and a "baby's" emerging head in the anterior ventricle position, is eagerly yanked from Satan's body by a devil midwife. The bloody venous strands hanging from Satan's mouths, the crater-like cavity in Satan's abdomen, and spewing from Satan's vagina depict an infernal cycle of chewing, consuming, digesting, and birthing. In his chapter on the grotesque body, Mikhail Bakhtin notes that the most fundamental elements of the grotesque body are the nose and mouth, especially the gaping mouth.¹²⁴ Further, Bakhtin's description of the grotesque body captures these central Italian artists' vision of Satan's cycle of chewing, consuming, digesting and birthing. For Bakhtin, the grotesque body, like the parturient body, is in the process of becoming; "It is never finished, never completed; it is continuously built, created and builds and creates another body."¹²⁵

Taddeo di Bartolo's hell [c. 1410] in the Collegiata, San Gimignano [Figure 15] also depicts Satan in a birth squat. Di Bartolo heightens the conflation of mouth and vagina by depicting his Satan with a so-called "nether-face" [Figure 16]. The term nether regions is defined as hell, the underworld of the dead, and colloquially as the lower part of the body, especially the genitals and buttocks.¹²⁶ Satan's upper face consumes the head of a naked body hanging from its toothed,

¹²⁴ Bakhtin, Mikhail, *Rabelais and His World*, Trans. Iswolsky, Helene. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984 edition, pp. 316 – 317.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, On Historical Principles*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, Fifth Edition, Volume 2, p. 1910.

gaping maw while its nether face, with its wide lipped mouth where a vagina would be, chewing and spitting out is birthing a “baby.” Di Bartolo’s Satan with its upper and nether mouth is doubly endowed with *vagina dentatae*, its “mouths” insatiably devouring bodies above and below. Satan’s glowing belly is inscribed with circular white lines drawing the eye to the navel in its center. On medieval maps Jerusalem was located at the *omphalos*, the navel or center of the world, the site of the Holy Land, the realm of eternity and everlasting rewards.¹²⁷ In their inversions of the Holy Land Buonamico and Di Bartolo have created a realm of eternal punishment and its *omphalos* is literally Satan’s navel which must be perpetually fed with the bodies of sinners.¹²⁸

The correspondences all three of these artists make between Satan’s insatiable mouth and insatiable vagina engage a popular trope in medieval texts and images. As Aimee Caya observes, “Lust was often described in terms of appetite, a connection only heightened by the conflation of female sexual organs, most obviously the labia, with the mouth.”¹²⁹ For Martha Easton, “The insatiable mouth as a signifier for the ultimate place of punishment appears in the vaginal construction of the hell mouth.”¹³⁰ The vagina as hell mouth, like the cave mouth in the Sinai, Siena and Venice *Nativities*, operates as another incarnation of the *vagina dentata*. In diverse

¹²⁷ Kline, Naomi Reed. *Maps of Medieval Thought, The Hereford Paradigm*. Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2012, p. 195.

¹²⁸ I thank my thesis supervisor, Joseph Monteyne, for suggesting this link between the *omphalos* and Satan’s navel.

¹²⁹ Caya, Aimee. “Carnal Consumption, miraculous Deliverance Saint Margaret and Caesarean Section in the Late Middle Ages.” *Glossolalia*, 2016, Vol. 7 (1), p. 11.

¹³⁰ Easton, [n. 13], p. 403.

medieval media from monumental frescoes to illuminated miniatures in Books of Hours, hell was visualized as an “...anthropomorphized body... entered through a monstrous mouth...”¹³¹ The body’s openings – mouth, vagina, and anus – were for Mikhail Bakhtin, the bodily features most strongly associated with the grotesque.¹³² There is no overestimating the degree to which the vagina and mouth generated anxiety about women as insatiable devourers. It is reflected in the ubiquity, diversity, and Christian significance of the figuring of mouth and vagina-like shapes in medieval visual culture – the Virgin’s red pallet, *vagina dentata*, *Nativity* cave mouths, hell mouths, baptismal fonts, Satan’s mouth and vagina, the *vesica piscis*, pubic triangles, mandorlas, and in depictions of Christ’s isolated side wound. The fear of mouth and vagina as devouring may be traceable to Augustine’s view that original sin originated in the womb at conception requiring the sacrifice of Christ.¹³³ Augustine’s view of women as tainted with corruption, echoed in Tertullian’s opinion that women are the “gate of hell,” is visually translated into a gaping, vaginal hell mouth.¹³⁴

In *Nativities* such as the *Sinai Nativity* situating the Virgin’s parturition in a cave, the cave’s jagged devouring *vagina dentata* entrance was held in tension with the cave’s sheltering interior function as a womblike refuge. In the *Last Judgment* iconography so disturbingly developed by Giotto, Buonamico and di Bartolo and many other late medieval painters, the cave’s positive

¹³¹ Caya, [n. 129], p. 15.

¹³² Bakhtin, [n. 124], pp. 316 – 317.

¹³³ Lynch, Joseph and Adamo, Phillip C. *The Medieval Church: A Brief History*. London and New York: Routledge, 2nd Ed., p. 286.

¹³⁴ Quoted in Rait, [n. 34], p. 421.

fecund, nurturing, attributes are exploded, replaced with dark, terrifying, and devouring associations. Satan's child birthing in the caves of Hell inverts the Virgin's *Nativity* in a cave. The protective cave is transformed into a chaotic pit of perpetual darkness and sadistic torture. The Virgin's formerly invisible childbirth becomes Satan's bestial, graphic display. Motherhood too, is inverted; instead of protecting her progeny the Satanic mother devours them. The animals adoring the neonate Christ in the *Nativity* become feral beasts inflicting violent sexual tortures on the naked human denizens of hell. Remarking on the lengthy history of the conflation of the feminine and demonic in western philosophical thought James Paxson observes that the demonic feminine is "one of the most permanent and powerful expressions of medieval misogyny."¹³⁵ Giotto's phantasmagoric *Last Judgment* with its rivers of menstrual blood and its womb-like cavernous recesses teeming with naked bodies conjures an apocalyptic vision of the deep, hidden, secret, interiors of the female sexual and reproductive systems [Figure 12]. Katharine Park tracks a shift beginning in the thirteenth century in the literature of women's health revealing a vein of intense preoccupation with generation and sexuality shaped by Aristotelian natural philosophy and Christian theology, both of which had a strong antifeminist element.¹³⁶ These works provoked a new and "unsavory, misogynist taint to the whole enterprise of writing publicly about women's bodies."¹³⁷ In these works, the female body, especially its fluids and

¹³⁵ Paxson, James J. "The Nether-Faced Devil and the Allegory of Parturition." *Studies in Iconography*, 1998, Vol. 19, p. 163.

¹³⁶ Park, Katharine. *Secrets of Women Gender, Generation, and the Origins of Human Dissection*. New York: Zone Books, 2010, p. 93.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

discharges, was vividly described as repellant, poisonous and toxic.¹³⁸ For Augustine, “woman was womb and womb was evil.”¹³⁹ Writing about women in the throes of childbirth, Augustine says, “in the feces and urine” of childbirth, “the closeness of woman to all that is vile, lowly, corruptible and material was epitomized.”¹⁴⁰ Giotto’s hell expresses the excesses of the medieval imaginary’s obsession and preoccupation with the demonic feminine. Cutting a cross section through the “intrinsically opaque” female abdomen and genitalia Giotto’s blood-fed caverns anatomize for the viewer the “enigma of the interiority of the female body.”¹⁴¹ The squatting Satans that birth their “babies” over a “dung” pile of excreted human bodies visualizes the Aristotelian notion of women in childbirth, of childbirth’s filth, of its “feces and urine.”¹⁴² Giotto’s rivers of blood, the devouring and excrescent feminized Satanic body, express the male anxiety generated by the terrifying suspicion that men were biologically unnecessary in human reproduction.¹⁴³ These feminized Satans articulate masculine fears that men were entirely

¹³⁸ Pseudo-Albertus Magnus quoted in Caya, [n. 129]; Bullough, Vern L. “Marriage in the Middle Ages Medieval Medical and Scientific Views of Women.” *Viator*, 1973 No. 4; Park, [n. 136] pp. 78 and 94.

¹³⁹ Warner, [n. 8], p. 57.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ “intrinsically opaque” is from Park, [n. 136], p. 102 “enigma of the interiority of the female body is from Jacquart, Danielle and Thomasset, Claude. *Sexuality and Medicine in the Middle Ages*, 1988, Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, pp. 44 – 46.

¹⁴² Aristotle quoted in Warner, [n. 8], p. 5.

¹⁴³ Crawford, Katherine. “Privilege, Possibility, and Perversion: Rethinking the Study of Early Modern Sexuality.” *The Journal of Modern History*. 2006, Vol. 78 (2), p. 147.

dependent on women for the survival of the species.¹⁴⁴ As Katherine Crawford observes, the inexact medieval knowledge about reproductive processes and questions concerning the male contribution to human reproduction “created tremendous unease around masculinity.”¹⁴⁵ This investigation of the grotesque and ugly in medieval art and its involvement with the figuring of women and of childbirth responds to the more simplistic explanation of Neff and Gertsman for the invisibility of the Virgin’s birth work in medieval visual culture. It is true that childbirth was considered grotesque and ugly but far from being an inappropriate subject for medieval Christian art as Neff and Gertsman assert, it was highly visible in a redirected form.¹⁴⁶ For the most talented and innovative medieval artists, Satan’s birth work in hell was an uncharted, fecund, and irresistible territory to unleash their imaginative, retributive, and often satiric powers.

As I stressed in the Introduction my methodological approach in analyzing the way gender is constructed in representations of the Virgin and Christ is informed by Nanette Salomon’s analysis of the asymmetrical artistic handling of the classical female and male nude.¹⁴⁷ In Salomon’s analysis of the classical female nudes’ *pudica* pose, the self-conscious gesture that concealed the pubis with a hand, in contrast to the unselfconscious treatment of male nudity, defined the *pudica* as fearful of her genitalia being exposed to view. Inhering in the *pudica* gesture is the male projection that female genitalia, unlike male genitalia, are shameful. Although

¹⁴⁴ Katz, Melissa R. “Mary, the Mirror, Sacred Imagery and Secular Experience.” *Picturing Mary: Woman Mother Idea*. Verdon, Timothy; Katz, Melissa R.; Remensnyder, Amy G. and Rubin Miri, Washington: National Museum of Women in the Arts, 2014, p. 51.

¹⁴⁵ Crawford, [n. 143], p. 147.

¹⁴⁶ Neff, [n. 1], p. 254; Gertsman, [n. 2], p. 62.

¹⁴⁷ Salomon, [n. 3].

obviously dissimilar in their artistic objectives, a strong thematic thread binds the classical female nude with her *pudica* gesture and the medieval Christian Virgin: the requirement to conceal shameful aspects of the female body. For the classical nude, modesty required one hand cover her pubis. As Salomon observes, male sexual organs were depicted in the same manner as other parts of the naked male body whereas the female nude is depicted as self-consciously naked, covering her pubis and therefore vulnerable. By directing the viewer's attention to the protective gesture of the hand covering her vagina the female form becomes defined by her external sexuality.¹⁴⁸ For the Virgin whose extraordinary chastity, dignity, and status elevated her above all other women, modesty required that her entire body be concealed to distinguish it from her dangerously carnal gender. The concealment of the Virgin's female body, the invisibility of her birth work, communicated a clear message that the female body was shameful in its entirety. Thus, the *female* act of childbirth, an act that exposed the exterior female genitalia to view, was considered ugly and grotesque.

3.2 Christ Transformed

The discussion here will now move to considering images of Christ. Before analyzing the figural asymmetry between the Virgin and Christ in medieval Christian art, it is necessary to trace a brief historiography of the textual and visual interpretation of the Crucifixion that preceded and underpinned it. In mid-thirteenth century Italy, a new interpretation of the Crucifixion begins to transform the figuring of Christ from *Christus Triumphans*, the Triumphal Christ to *Christus*

¹⁴⁸ Salomon, [n. 3], p. 61.

Patiens, the Suffering Christ.¹⁴⁹ I argue that the visual transformation of *Triumphans* to *Patiens* was accompanied by a textual campaign to construct Christ, rather than the Virgin, as the mother of humankind.

Christus Triumphans [Figure 17] – standing with his head erect before the cross looking at the viewer – is victorious over death. His replacement, *Christus Patiens*, [Figure 18] is a figure of absolute abjection. Crucifixion, a shameful mode of execution reserved for non-Roman criminals and slaves included the humiliation of a public display of nudity and a slow, painful death by suffocation.¹⁵⁰ For centuries, Christ’s death by crucifixion was considered too degrading for visual representation.¹⁵¹ The earliest depictions of Christ crucified are “apologetic” – no cross is visible.¹⁵² In later depictions, the ignominy of crucifixion is mitigated by its conflation with resurrection in the figure of *Christus Triumphans*.¹⁵³ Flora Lewis observes “...the long-standing devotion to [Christ’s] wounds underwent a shift [in the thirteenth century] that was concrete and visual – people wanted to *see* Christ’s wounds.”¹⁵⁴ It was the church’s careful ascription of polyvalent meaning to Christ’s skin, lacerations, blood, and pain that ignited the desire to see, touch, and kiss Christ’s wounds. A nearly naked, abject Christ resonated with the Franciscans

¹⁴⁹ Derbes, [n. 12], p. 64.

¹⁵⁰ Coogan, [n. 20], p. 53.

¹⁵¹ Murray and Murray, [n. 28], p. 137.

¹⁵² Spivey, Nigel. *Enduring Creation: Art, Pain and Fortitude*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001, p. 47.

¹⁵³ Easton, [n. 13], p. 395; Murray and Murray, [n. 28], p. 137.

¹⁵⁴ Lewis, Flora. [n. 13], p. 209, emphasis in original.

whose founding oath of poverty was repeatedly linked by Bonaventura to Christ's nakedness on the cross.¹⁵⁵ The visual elements of Christ's transformation from *Triumphans* to *Patiens* include a more painterly naturalistic modeling of Christ's skin and a replacement of Christ's opaque loincloth with a translucent one.¹⁵⁶ As Anne Derbes has noted, at one time scholars credited Cimabue with distancing himself from the Italo-Byzantine style of painted Crucifixes by deploying these transformations.¹⁵⁷ Derbes convincingly demonstrates that those features of Cimabue's c. 1270 – 5 painted *Christus Patiens*, a predecessor of Giotto's *Christus Patiens*, are appropriated from Byzantine images introduced to Italy.¹⁵⁸ Derbes suggests that one of the appealing aspects, particularly to Franciscans, of the introduction of these Byzantine features, including the translucent loin cloth "...may be the fact that it presents [the viewer] with a nearly nude image of Christ on the cross."¹⁵⁹

Initially, a naked, wounded, bleeding Christ would have appeared "almost unbearably graphic" to medieval sensibilities.¹⁶⁰ Even before his visual transformation from *Triumphans* to *Patiens* a series of texts and sermons urged Christians to meditate on Christ's body on the cross and rehearse those features, the lolling head, outstretched arms, bleeding wounds, that were later

¹⁵⁵ Derbes, [n. 12], pp. 30 – 31.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p. 28.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p. 48.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 28 – 30.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p. 30.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p. 5.

emphasized in figuring Christ as *Christus Patiens*.¹⁶¹ Although each of the Gospels contains an account of the crucifixion, Christ's suffering is not emphasized.¹⁶² "The suffering Christ," as James Marrow notes, "does not really appear in the Gospels."¹⁶³ Texts and images introduced in the thirteenth century demanded an emotional identification with Christ's sufferings and focused intently on the Passion.¹⁶⁴ In images, as David Aers observes: "Christ's body was now displayed with an attention to physical details utterly unknown to the Gospels."¹⁶⁵ The church's encouragement of private meditation and prayer focusing on Christ's agonies on the cross gave rise to a "...compelling, not to say obsessive, stress on the concrete details of [Christ's] Passion...intended to foster the viewer or reader's affective identification with the suffering Christ."¹⁶⁶ The Dominican Archbishop Jacobus de Voragine's popular, widely circulated thirteenth century work *The Golden Legend*, in a sermon on Christ's Passion, describes each torture Christ suffered in excruciating detail:

...The fourth pain of the Passion was due to the tenderness of His body. ...The fifth pain of the Passion consisted in that it affected every part of His being and all His senses. He suffered in His eyes, because He wept with a strong cry and tears, as we read in the epistle to the Hebrews...on the cross. He shed tears of pain. He suffered in His hearing, when

¹⁶¹ De Voragine, Jacobus. *The Golden Legend*. Granger, Ryan and Ripperger, Helmut [Trans], London, New York, Toronto: Longmans, Green and Co., 1941, pp. 208 – 216.; Bonaventura, Bonaventurae Opera omnia. Ed. Peltier, A.C. 15 Vols. Paris: Vives, 1864 – 1871.

¹⁶² Easton, [n. 13], p. 395.

¹⁶³ Marrow, James. *Passion Iconography In Northern European Art of the Late Middle Ages and Early Renaissance, A study of the transformation of Sacred metaphor into descriptive narrative*, p. 8.

¹⁶⁴ Bynum, [n. 6]. Marrow, [n. 163], p. 8.

¹⁶⁵ Aers, [n. 11], p. 1.

¹⁶⁶ Smith, [n. 11], p. 129.

insults and blasphemies were heaped upon Him. ...He suffered in the sense of smell, because from the hill of Calvary there arose a great stench, which came from the rotting bodies of the dead. ...He suffered in the sense of taste, for when He cried out, *I thirst*, they gave Him vinegar mixed with myrrh and gall. The vinegar was given to make Him die more quickly, so that the guards might be finished with their task; and the myrrh was foul-smelling, and the gall bitter to the taste. He suffered in the sense of touch, for He was wounded in every part of His body, and from the sole of His feet to the top of His head there was no soundness in Him.¹⁶⁷

De Voragine's Passion sermon invoking sight, sound, taste, smell, and touch dilated the Gospels' cursory description into a sensory experiential drama. *The Golden Legend*, an important source for the Arena chapel's and many other pictorial programs, was also a rich repository of material mined for sermons by priests.¹⁶⁸

During Mass, Christians were instructed to focus on an image of *Christus Patiens* and to interpret Christ's bodily disposition on the cross in a particular manner:

...the head bowed to kiss, the arms outspread to embrace, the hands pierced to pour out gifts, the feet held fast to remain with us, the body fully extended to spend Himself solely for us"¹⁶⁹

Historian Sara Lipton identifies Bernard of Clairvaux's instruction to congregants to interpret the crucified body as a physical embrasure of the beholder as a popular trope in medieval sermons and texts.¹⁷⁰ These medieval sermons and texts schooled Christians to interpret Christ's lolling

¹⁶⁷ De Voragine, [n. 161], pp. 208 – 211.

¹⁶⁸ Pisani, Giuliano. *La concezione agostiniana del programma teologico della Cappella degli Scrovegni*, in *Alberto da Padova e la cultura degli agostiniani*, a cura di F. Bottin, Padova University Press 2014; Derbes and Sandona [n. 110]; Jacobus, Laura. "Piety and Propriety in the Arena Chapel." *Renaissance Studies*, 1998, Vol. 12 (2).

¹⁶⁹ Bernard of Clairvaux quoted in de Voragine [n. 161], p. 212.

¹⁷⁰ Lipton, [n. 6], p. 1196, in addition to the examples of the trope compiled by Lipton a further example of the trope is its use by the Monk of Farne quoted in Gertsman [n. 2], p. 85.

head as leaning sweetly forward to kiss the beholder's mouth and Christ's impaled and bloody arms as stretching outward to embrace the beholder's body. The existence of this recurring motif suggests congregants required assistance to overcome their aversion to the figuring of Christ as *Christus Patiens*.¹⁷¹ The viewer's visual encounter with *Christus Patiens* is manipulated through a "heuristic of revulsion."¹⁷² Viewers, made to feel guilty by their initial repugnance to Christ's tortured body, are taught a "carefully orchestrated meaning" to attach to the image.¹⁷³ At the end of the Passion sermon the physical contact suggested in the homily was enacted; a crucifix was provided to the congregants and they were encouraged to kiss *Christus Patiens*' wounds.¹⁷⁴ Depending on context and viewing audience the physical contact between Christ's body and the beholders, suggested in the sermon or text, could signify affectively as well as hetero-erotically or homoerotically.¹⁷⁵ Christ's androgynous naked body, as Sarah Beckwith has remarked, is a receptive site for projections of desire across the gender spectrum.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷¹ Lipton, [n. 6], p. 1185.

¹⁷² *Ibid*, p. 1187.

¹⁷³ *Ibid*, p. 1191.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p. 1199.

¹⁷⁵ Trexler, Richard C. Gendering Jesus Crucified. *Iconography at the Crossroads Papers from the Colloquium Sponsored by the Index of Christian Art Princeton University*. Cassidy, Brendan [Ed.] Princeton University Press, 1990, p. 109; Mills, Robert. "Ecce Homo" in *Gender and Holiness: men, Woman and Saints in Late Medieval Europe*. Riches, Samantha and Salih, Sarah [Eds.] London and New York: Routledge, 2002, p. 153; Lochrie, Karina. "Mystical Acts, Queer Tendencies." Lochrie, Karina, McCracken, Peggy and Schultz, James A. [Eds] in *Constructing Medieval Sexuality*, Minneapolis, 1997, p. 190; Easton, [n. 13], p. 397.

¹⁷⁶ Beckwith, Sarah "A Very Material Mysticism: The Medieval Mysticism of Margery Kempe," in *Medieval Literature, Criticism, Ideology and History*, [Ed.] D Aers, 1986, pp. 47 – 48.

The presence of *Christus Patiens*' naked, suffering body placed on every altar or rood screen participates in a popular rhetorical practice that priests were exhorted to follow. Texts providing instructions to priests for delivering effective sermons urged them to mobilize the body and physical experience to create compelling visual images that "bodied forth" the religious lessons to be conveyed to their congregation.¹⁷⁷ This is what Stephen of Bourbon's widely used collection of *exempla* instructs:

Wise men body forth their speech by clothing it in similitudes and *exempla*. For corporeal speech moves more easily from the senses to the imagination and from the imagination to the memory.¹⁷⁸

By repeatedly using Christ's body as an *exempla*, instructing their congregations to envision his crucified body as a lover about to embrace and kiss them, did priests transform Christ's male body into a female body? In her text on the role of memory in medieval culture Mary Carruthers observes: "images should be of extremes – of ugliness or beauty, ridicule or nobility...[b]loody figures, or monstrosities" to rivet the attention and focus the memory.¹⁷⁹ *Christus Patiens*' naked, bleeding body, its physical attitude of abandoned abjection, knees pulled up in a contraction of pain, seems to be modelled on the female body in the throes of childbirth labour. This violent,

¹⁷⁷ Dalmaso, Veronique. "Integritas, Proportio, and Claritas: The Body in Tuscan Representations of Baptism, 1300 – 1450." *The Meanings of Nudity in Medieval Art*. Lindquist, Sherry C.M. [Ed.] London and New York: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2012, p. 232; Smith, Susan L. *The Power of Women: A Topos in Medieval Art and Literature*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995, pp. 104 – 105.

¹⁷⁸ Stephen of Bourbon, *Tractatus de diversis materiis predictabilibus* p. 5, quoted in Smith, [n. 177], p. 103.

¹⁷⁹ Carruthers, Mary, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008 edition, pp. 167 – 168.

vivid, displacement of childbirth labour onto Christ's male body constructs him as a mnemonic *exempla* par excellence.

The Cistercian order actually developed a devotional practice of "Jesus our Mother" within the broader context of an emotional spirituality and a feminization of religious language.¹⁸⁰ In sermons and texts Bernard of Clairvaux and other male church authorities used maternal metaphors to compare Christ's nourishing of the spirit to a breast-feeding mother.¹⁸¹ An extract from Cistercian Aelred of Rievaulx's text schools Christians in the contemplation of Christ's suffering body during Mass:

On your altar let it be enough for you to have a representation of our Savior hanging on the cross; that will bring before your mind his Passion for you to imitate, his outspread arms will invite you to embrace him, his naked breasts will feed you with the milk of sweetness to console you.¹⁸²

The metaphor of breast-feeding mother was not confined to Christ. Bernard constructs other church authorities, Abbots, and particularly himself, as a nurturing breast-feeding mother.¹⁸³ At the same time that the Cistercians, and other religious orders, appropriated female generative powers to construct Christ and themselves as nurturing they exhibited hostility to actual women and mothers.¹⁸⁴ Saints and mystics focused on Christ's wounds envisioning nursing from and

¹⁸⁰ Bynum, [n. 6], p. 129.

¹⁸¹ Miller, Sarah Alison. "Virgins, Mothers, Monsters: Late Medieval Readings of the Female Body Out of Bounds." Ph.D. Dissertation, Chapel Hill, 2008., p. 229.

¹⁸² Quoted in Bynum, [n. 6], p. 123.

¹⁸³ Bynum, [n. 6] p. 112.

¹⁸⁴ Bildhauer, Bettina. "Blood in Medieval Cultures." *History Compass*, 2006, Vol. 4 (6), pp. 1051; Warner, [n. 19], pp. 57 – 58.

penetrating Christ's side puncture to achieve mystical union.¹⁸⁵ Julian of Norwich's recounting of her visions developed a "theology of Christ's maternity predicated on the permeability of his flesh."¹⁸⁶ Late medieval texts and images encouraged veneration of the qualities of Christ's body that were divine and salvific – milk giving, permeable, fragmented, bloody, leaking and generative. It is of the utmost significance that these are the very same feminine qualities deemed grotesque and repellant when associated with the female body and thus erased from Christian visual culture.¹⁸⁷ The medieval visionary Marguerite of Oingt even describes Christ giving birth on the "hard bed of the cross...[a]nd truly it is no surprise that your veins burst when in one day

¹⁸⁵ Easton, [n. 13], p. 398.

¹⁸⁶ Miller, [n.181], p. 96.

¹⁸⁷ An important exception to the Virgin being fully clothed are, of course, the countless images of the Virgin breast-feeding the infant Christ, the *Madonna Lactans* or the *Madonna del Latte*, and the *Theotokos Galactotrophousa*, a Byzantine example which became very common in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Murray and Murray, [n. 51], p. 314. Several scholars have demonstrated that while the nude female body was often represented in medieval art especially in connection with depicting Eve, the scholarly literature has been reluctant to acknowledge the naked female body's presence in medieval art as historical narratives favor a tradition that images of the female nude reappeared in the Renaissance after being absent in medieval visual culture. See Lindquist, Sherry C.M. "Introduction." *The Meanings of Nudity in Medieval Art*. Lindquist, Sherry C.M. [Ed.] London and New York: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2012, pp. 1 – 46, for a discussion on the presence and variety of the nude female body in medieval art; and see Long, Jane C. "The Survival and Reception of the Classical Nude: Venus in the Middle Ages." *The Meanings of Nudity in Medieval Art*. Lindquist, [n. 101], pp. 47 – 64.

you gave birth to the whole world.”¹⁸⁸ For the mystic Julian of Norwich “... Christ is our *true* mother in whom we are endlessly being born and shall never emerge from him.”¹⁸⁹

3.3 Christ Giving Birth on the Cross

Christ is figured as a mother giving birth on the cross in illuminations depicting the *Birth of Ecclesia* [Figure 19]. In this medallion from a thirteenth century French Bible *Moralisée*, a moralized picture Bible, a “baby” is delivered from Christ’s side wound. The “baby” resembling a miniature Christ clothed in blood red grasps a Eucharist chalice understood to contain Christ’s blood mixed with water, reminiscent of childbirth fluids. The “baby” is delivered by pulling its body out of Christ’s vaginal side wound as the Saviour, in Marguerite of Oingt’s words, gives birth on the “hard bed of the cross.”¹⁹⁰ The midwife in this image is a figure, who, except for the absence of stigmata, also resembles Christ. This figure is the Christ/God of eternity and Genesis. With this visualization, Christ performs the roles of parturient mother, infant, and midwife. As Elaine Pagels observes the early church deliberately suppressed texts, such as the Gnostic gospels that perceived God as a combination of male and female elements, challenging the origin story of a monotheistic masculine God.¹⁹¹ The early Christian church promoted male authority to

¹⁸⁸ Marguerite of Oingt, quoted in Bynum, Caroline Walker. *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion*, New York: Cambridge, MIT Press, 1991, p. 97.

¹⁸⁹ Julian of Norwich quoted in Gertsman [n. 2], p. 91, my emphasis. For a recent historiography of the concept of a female Jesus in Christian sects in Europe and early America see Fogleman, Aaron Spencer. *Jesus is Female Moravians and Radical Religion in Early America*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007, p. 83.

¹⁹⁰ Marguerite of Oingt, quoted in Bynum [n. 188], p. 97.

¹⁹¹ Pagels, Elaine. *The Gnostic Gospels*. New York: Random House, 1979, p. xviii.

construct a doctrine legitimizing the apostolic succession of bishops, the foundation of papal authority.¹⁹² The Christian origin story favored by the early church inverts human biology: a male God creates the first man out of whose rib the first woman is created. Medieval texts and images reinforced the concept of the male generation of humankind. The *Bible Moralisée*'s "image word matrix" is carefully structured to exercise a tight control over the viewer's reception of its images which are each accompanied by an explanatory text.¹⁹³ The argument implicit in the moralized Bible is that the "rapidly-changing world of the thirteenth century can be interpreted by recourse to the Bible and that this interpretation can be articulated primarily through images."¹⁹⁴ Gerald B. Guest observes that there are some glaring omissions in the thousands of images that comprise the *Bible Moralisée*'s pictorial program. In Guest's view "[p]erhaps the most striking [omission] is the paucity of women."¹⁹⁵ In a work whose function was to interpret contemporary life and society using the Bible as a moral guide, women are almost invisible and, if present at all, are depicted as "either virgins or temptresses."¹⁹⁶

Even more disturbing than the invisibility of women mentioned by Guest is the *Bible Moralisée*'s displacement of childbirth onto the male body. In the thousands of images contained within its medallions the *Bible Moralisée* includes two depictions of childbirth. The Genesis

¹⁹² *Ibid*, p. 49

¹⁹³ Guest, Gerald, B. *Commentary and Translation, Bible Moralisee*, Codex Vindobonensis 2554, Vienna, Osterreichische Nationalbibliothek, London: Harvey Miller Publishers, 1995 p. 1.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 18.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 37.

¹⁹⁶ Guest, [n. 193] pp. 29 – 30, 37.

story of the birth of Eve is juxtaposed with Christ's birth of *Ecclesia*, Christ, the new Adam, brings eternal salvation. The image of the Genesis story depicts a naked Adam resting on a rock [Figure 20]. Adam's physical attitude is modelled on a woman in childbirth: he is viewed from the side in a semi-squatting position, his torso supported against a rock, knees apart, and eyes closed. From above his rounded abdomen a male figure whose face resembles both Adam's and Christ's in the medallion below, delivers a naked "child" from Adam's side. The figure's cross halo identifies him as the eternal Almighty based on the idea of Christ's existence from the beginning: "I am the Alpha and the Omega, says the Lord God who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty." [Revelation 1:8]¹⁹⁷ The text accompanying the medallion reads:

Here God makes man in His image and makes him sleep, and He takes Eve from the side of Adam, and he makes different animals.¹⁹⁸

Immediately below the depiction of the birth of Eve from Adam's side is the depiction of the *Birth of Ecclesia*. The text accompanying [Figure 19] reads:

That God makes Adam sleep signifies the Father who makes the Son sleep on the Cross. Eve, who issued from Adam's side, signifies the Holy Church, which issued from the side of Jesus Christ crowned with twelve graces. The different creatures signify the different religions.¹⁹⁹

Although the text refers to the figure being pulled from Adam's side in Figure 20 as Eve there are no visual physical clues to the figure's gender, the body is androgynous and on a smaller more childlike scale than Adam's. In a text whose avowed intention is to provide a moral guide

¹⁹⁷ I thank Dr. Carol Knicely for identifying the figure with the cross halo as God as Christ and for connecting this figure with Revelation 1:8.

¹⁹⁸ Guest, [n. 193], p. 54.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

for contemporary life, women are almost invisible and the only bodies that give birth to “children” are Christ’s male body and that of his similar looking prefiguration, Adam. The world constructed within each of these two “childbirth” medallions is an exclusively male one.

3.4 The Asymmetrical Artistic Handling of the Bodies of the Virgin and Christ

Giotto’s depiction of the Virgin in his *Nativity* [Figure 21] and his *Christus Patiens* [Figure 18] were completed about the same time in c. 1305 and afford a productive opportunity to examine the artistic handling of their respective bodies. His *Christus Patiens*, with its side wound spouting blood, captures the mid-thirteenth century shift in the interpretation of the crucifixion from *Triumphans* to *Patiens*. Giotto’s Arena Chapel *Nativity* does not conform to the visual traditions of the Byzantine model and, because it was completed some six decades before St. Birgitta’s vision, it is not influenced by the iconography of the child-like kneeling Virgin praying to her son. However, as discussed in Chapter 2, the Franciscan acceptance of the Virgin’s Immaculate Conception had infiltrated central Italian figuring of the Virgin’s mother St. Anne by the time Giotto executed his Paduan fresco cycle. Giotto’s *Meeting at the Golden Gate* depicting Joachim and Anne embracing is understood by scholars to be an example of one of the early approaches to visually translating the supernatural nature of the Virgin’s conception.²⁰⁰ In his *Nativity* Giotto represents the Virgin at some point shortly after she has given birth to Christ. The Virgin reclines under a rustic shelter constructed on an altar-like rock ledge, lying on a pallet. Although the fresco has sustained significant paint loss, the pallet appears to be red and squared at the edge rather than mandorla-shaped. Behind the Virgin, the darker grey and rounded forms in the rock suggest recesses or even an entrance to a cave, merging notions of altar, shed, and

²⁰⁰ Buffer and Horner, [n. 71], pp. 188 – 189; Erhardt, [n. 87], pp. 271 – 272.

cave. Post-partum, the Virgin is perfectly composed, fully clothed with no bare skin visible except for her neck, face, and hands. Even her fair hair is impeccably restrained, wrapped neatly around her head in braids. Her body is intact; she is cleansed of birthing fluids and her clothes are tidily arranged and unsoiled. Her demeanor, too, is serene. Like Byzantine Virgins, Giotto's Virgin reclines, but unlike them she is not disheveled or in a bodily attitude that alludes to her birth work. Lying on her side with her arms outstretched she is handed the swaddled and cleansed neonate Christ, as if he was a gift, born off stage, in some other place by some other body. The Virgin's somatic experience of parturience finds no register in any aspect of her face, body, attitude, demeanor, or clothing. In his depiction of Christ crucified, Giotto represents Christ at the moment after his death. The crucified Christ is naked except for a transparent loincloth and the naked skin of his body is ruptured and bleeding. Although he is dead and his heart would no longer be pumping blood through his circulatory system, Christ's blood continues to pour from his hands and feet, spouting from the gash of his side wound. Slumping awkwardly, hanging from the cross's horizontal arm to which his hands are nailed, his head abjectly bent, Christ embodies every pain endured during the Passion. Christ's bloody vaginal shaped side wound, explicitly displayed and bleeding, emblemizes his suffering.

Although it is the Virgin who has given birth, the church's anxiety concerning the female body's carnality required her depiction to be carefully regulated. Images of the Virgin celebrating her *raison d'être*, the birth of Christ, conceal all visual indicia of her birth work. The body of the crucified Christ, on the other hand, displays all the indicia of childbirth labor, enacting the bodily contractions, rupturing, discharge of birthing fluids, and pain of childbirth. The model for the crucified Christ figured as *Christus Patiens*, his ruptured, bleeding body contracted in a spasm of

agony, is childbirth labor.²⁰¹ The visual emphasis focusing on the disrobed Christ's naked skin, blood, pain, and especially his wounds, was assiduously reinforced by sermons and texts. For every significant event of the Passion – the flagellation, mocking, crucifixion, descent from the cross, lamentation, and resurrection – Christ was stripped naked.²⁰² Christ's public disrobing visually cued the viewer to an impending transformative event. Christ's naked skin exerted an extraordinary communicative power. Medieval texts identified public disrobing as a special form of suffering through abasement.²⁰³ Public nakedness, the exposing of the body to public scrutiny, was humiliating, shameful, an "additional indignity inflicting psychic and physical pain."²⁰⁴ For Robert Mills the naked body operates as a touchstone of signification: "subjectivity is written in the lines of the whole body."²⁰⁵ Christ's "liquescent" body, to adopt Mills' marvelous term, reverberated with his voluntary assumption of suffering and sacrifice.²⁰⁶ *Christus Patiens* naked body fully realizes the body's expressive potential, "the deep meditative possibilities" of the skin.²⁰⁷ The "unclothed body", as Suzanne Lewis notes, "is always problematical and at the same

²⁰¹ Easton, [n. 13], p. 401.

²⁰² Lindquist, [n. 187], p. 12.

²⁰³ Smith, [n. 11], p. 139.

²⁰⁴ Derbes, [n. 12], p. 151.

²⁰⁵ Mills, [n. 175], p. 144.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid*, p. 157.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid*, p. 66.

time meaningful.”²⁰⁸ I would rephrase this as meaningful because problematic. Sarah Kay describes skin as “an inscribing surface” and a “primary means of communicating with others.”²⁰⁹ Medieval people understood that the naked male body possessed agency; as St. Birgitta observed, Christ’s body spoke by disrobing.²¹⁰

Images of the Virgin erase any birthing fluids whereas the crucified Christ is depicted as continuously bleeding. To my knowledge there are no images in any artistic period which depict the Virgin with the actual fluids of childbirth, water and blood, on her skin or clothing. Like Christ’s bare skin, blood held complex historical, symbolic, and magical properties for medieval audiences.²¹¹ An outbreak of “blood mysticism” in the fourteenth century including practices of venerating Christ’s blood relics, blood visions, and “blood-drinking” suggest blood’s potency as a symbol.²¹² Blood is, as Caroline Walker Bynum observes, paradoxical: physiologically and symbolically equated with both life and death.²¹³ The blood streaming from Christ’s wounds

²⁰⁸ Lewis, Suzanne, “Introduction: Medieval Bodies Then and Now: Negotiating Problems of Ambivalence and Paradox.” Wilcox, Jonathan and Withers, Benjamin, [Eds.] *Naked Before God: Uncovering the Body in Anglo-Saxon England*. Morgantown, W.V.: West Virginia University Press, 2003, p. 15.

²⁰⁹ Kay, Sarah. “Flayed Skin as *objeta*: Representation and Materiality in Guillaume de Deguileville’s *Pelerinage de vie humaine*. *Medieval Fabrications: Dress, Textiles, Cloth Work and Other Cultural Imaginings*. Burns, E. Jane [Ed.] New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004, p. 59.

²¹⁰ St. Birgitta quoted in Schleif, [n. 63].

²¹¹ Rubin, Miri. “The Person in the Form: Medieval Challenges to Bodily ‘Order.’” In *Framing Medieval Bodies*, Eds. Kay, Sarah and Rubin, Miri. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994, p. 113.

²¹² Bynum, Caroline Walker. “The Blood of Christ in the Later Middle Ages.” *Church History*, 2002, Vol. 71 (4), p. 704; Rubin, [n. 187], p. 70.

²¹³ *Ibid.*

made visible his multiple roles: portal to salvation, atonement sacrifice, murdered victim, and parturient mother to humankind.²¹⁴ Blurring Christ's female and salvific qualities, the medieval German mystic Henry Suso [c. 1295 – 1366] refers to him as the “gate that must be penetrated to attain salvation.”²¹⁵

Christ's blood also performed an accusatory function; medieval audiences were continuously reminded that Christ's blood was shed for their sins.²¹⁶ Women were particularly implicated in Christ's crucifixion: “[b]ecause of the fall, Eve's [menstrual] blood flowed and because of her, Christ's body was pierced and his redemptive blood spilled.”²¹⁷ Complex and problematic, blood's significance for medieval people ensured that images of *Christus Patiens* bleeding body operated on multiple registers.

Although every human child is born on a wave of rupturing, water, blood, and pain, the medieval church and medieval science considered parturient blood unclean, disgusting, and dangerous.²¹⁸ The church manipulated medieval audiences' reception to Christ's blood through a focus on Christ's suffering, the devotional practice of wound adoration, the sacrament of the Eucharist,

²¹⁴ Christ is referred to as the door in the *Gospel of John* 10:19; The medieval German mystic Henry Suso referred to Christ as the “gate that must be penetrated to attain salvation” quoted in Smith, [n. 11], p. 130.

²¹⁵ Quoted in Smith, [n. 11], p. 130.

²¹⁶ Bynum, [n. 188], p. 714.

²¹⁷ Easton, [n. 13], p. 398.

²¹⁸ Bullough, [n. 138], p. 489; Cadden, Joan. *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages; Medicine, Science and Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 174.

and most significantly with images, particularly of *Christus Patiens*. Rubin observes: “[t]he shedding of blood, the most complete unmaking of the body, was the ultimate offering, ultimate sacrifice, most complete pain.”²¹⁹ However, the shedding of blood only held sacred, profound, salvific valences when it was associated with Christ’s male body.

The medieval church constructed a hierarchy of pain that placed Christ at its apogee. Although the church suggested that women’s bodies were usually more sensitive than men’s, Christ was exceptional due to his “entirely virginal...[flesh that] registered pain more keenly than any other body.”²²⁰ De Voragine held that Christ’s pain was more excruciating “due to the tenderness of his body.”²²¹ The *Meditationes Vitae Christi*, a biography of Christ attributed at least in part to Bonaventura, interspersing details from the Gospels with extra-Gospel stories, recounted how Christ’s garments adhered to his bloody flagellated skin when he was stripped causing inconceivable torment.²²² The scholastic philosopher Thomas Aquinas, a contemporary of Bonaventura’s, emphasized how the excruciating agonies inflicted on Christ’s tender flesh were heightened by the psychic and emotional torments of his betrayal and abandonment.²²³ For medieval people physical pain was a function of the soul – and the path to “salvation, purgation,

²¹⁹ Rubin, Miri. *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 115.

²²⁰ Saint Bonaventura quoted in Easton, [n. 13], p. 396.

²²¹ De Voragine, [n. 161], p. 209.

²²² Marrow, [n. 163], p. 1; Smith, [n. 11], p. 131; Derbes, [n. 12], p. 150; Murray and Murray, [n. 28], p. 63.

²²³ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 3a, q. 46, art 4, quoted in Cohen, Esther. "The animated pain of the body." *The American Historical Review*, 2000, Vol. 105 [1], pp. 46 – 47.

and truth.”²²⁴ Pain signified grace and redemption; Christ’s pain atoned and saved.²²⁵ As Rubin observes: “the suffering of the human Christ was the image most amenable to personal identifications...”²²⁶ Popular texts including Bonaventura’s *De Perfection vitae ad sorores* and the *Meditationes vitae Christi*, intimately connected Christ’s suffering with humanity’s redemption.²²⁷ *Christus Patiens* liminal status between life and death, his indeterminate gender – both male god and parturient mother, his hybridity as human/god – the excruciating pain and suffering of the Passion, the blood that flowed from his vaginal side wound, construct him, in de Voragine’s words, as a “fruitful, fertile sacrifice.”²²⁸

The Virgin Mary’s freedom from sex, guilt, and fear meant that she did not suffer the pains of labor or childbirth.²²⁹ Nor was the Virgin, as the chosen one, the one blessed among women, subjected to the shame or humiliation routinely endured by her gender. Mary’s fictional virginity not only separated her from her gender, it narrowly restricted her expressive potential in Western visual culture. Even so, the ubiquity of her image, the universality of the double portrait of

²²⁴ Cohen, [n. 223], p. 42; Bynum, [n. 212], p. 235; Easton, Martha. "Pain, Torture and Death in the Huntington Library *Legenda aurea*." *Gender and Holiness: Men, women and saints in late medieval Europe* Riches, Samantha and Salih, Sarah, Eds. London: Routledge, 2002, p. 51; Rey, Roselyne. *The History of Pain*, Harvard University Press, 1995, p. 49; Olson, Trisha. “The Medieval Blood Sanction and the Divine Beneficence of Pain: 100 – 1450 *bepress Legal Series*, 2005, p. 30.

²²⁵ Easton, [n. 224], pp. 52 – 53.

²²⁶ Rubin, [n. 211], p. 302.

²²⁷ Easton, [n. 224], p. 53.

²²⁸ Mills, [n. 175], p. 162; de Voragine, [n. 161], p. 90.

²²⁹ Cohen, [n. 223], p. 46; Rubin, [n. 211], p. 114.

mother and child, the adoration and veneration she inspired, demonstrate that her figural form resonated deeply with medieval audiences. In the Virgin's depiction as pagan mother-goddess in the cave, the semi-recumbent figure of Byzantine *Nativities*, one glimpses the potent chthonic force that the Western church sought to regulate and Christianize. Through the figuring of Christ as *Christus Patiens* and the ascription of potent valences to Christ's skin, blood, and pain, the Church adeptly transformed a figure that initially offended medieval sensibilities into a multivalent reservoir of meaning. The church's misogynistic characterization of Mary as a virgin and the taboos and prohibitions circumscribing the representation of her female body meant the Virgin could not "body forth" her birth work. Instead, the Virgin's birth work was displaced onto *Christus Patiens* "birth-giving wound."

Chapter 4: Venerating Christ's Side Wound

The medieval church assiduously cultivated veneration of Christ's bloody side wound. The most startling depiction of Christ's side wound is its isolation as an independent subject for the purpose of wound adoration. Beginning in monasteries in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, wound veneration soon spread to lay devotional practices.²³⁰ Images of Christ's wounds and the instruments of his torture – *Arma Christi* – invaded medieval visual culture and augmented late medieval devotional practices.²³¹ Pictures devoted solely to Christ's side wound depicting the rubricated wound vertically, slit open, and shedding blood are “powerfully sexual” and “inescapably vaginal.”²³² Christ's side wound imagery is also decidedly parturient. In images and texts, Christ's side wound operated both as breast and vagina, performing the female body's “bleeding, lactating, and birthing functions.”²³³ The beholder was instructed to meditate upon the wound to achieve a spiritual union with Christ. The metaphorical language of meditative union and mysticism utilized the vocabulary of physical and sexual union. During their visions, female mystics “...drank from Christ's wound, kissed it, penetrated it, and were penetrated in return as the grace of God flowed through them and they shook with ecstasy.”²³⁴ Until very recently, an absence of discourse about certain types of images, usually of an erotic or sexual nature, created

²³⁰ Rubin, [n. 219], p. 302.

²³¹ Lewis, [n. 13], p. 204.

²³² “powerfully sexual” is from Lewis, [n. 13], p. 215; “inescapably vaginal” is from Easton, [n. 13], pp. 396 – 397.

²³³ Easton, [n. 13], p. 400.

²³⁴ *Ibid*, p. 400.

“harrowing silences” and omissions in the art historical record.²³⁵ The isolated side wound, rubricated and vaginal in form, is one example of these types of images examined in my dissertation that was rarely reproduced or analyzed by art historians until very recently.²³⁶

An arresting miniature of Christ’s side wound flanked by the instruments of the Passion [Figure 22] is one of 14 miniatures in a psalter written and illustrated for Bonne of Luxembourg, daughter of the King of Bohemia, and wife of Jean of Valois the heir of the French King Philip VI.²³⁷ The Psalter, produced between 1345 and 1349, is attributed to Jean Le Noir.²³⁸ Its visual program was tailored to Bonne of Luxembourg’s personal concerns and touches on themes of dynastic marriage, fertility, and lineage, linking notions of royalty and divinity. As wife to the heir of the French throne, Bonne of Luxembourg’s reproductive capacities were of national significance and the Psalter’s visual program is as concerned with royal self-fashioning as it is with spirituality. On the coat of arms depicted beneath the illumination of the side wound, the

²³⁵ “harrowing art-historical silence” is from Salomon, [n. 3] “The Venus *Pudica*”, p. 102.

²³⁶ Easton, [n. 13], p. 396. Other examples of gaps and exclusions are the reluctance of art historians to acknowledge the late medieval and Renaissance proliferation of pictures foregrounding the infant Christ’s penis identified by Leo Steinberg [n.84] discussed in Chapter 5; the absence of uterine blood in images depicting the “woman with the issue of blood” discussed later in this chapter, Nanette Salomon’s identification of art history’s failure to interrogate the asymmetric artistic handling of the male and female nude in late medieval and Renaissance visual culture [n. 3]; and my argument that the Virgin’s vagina was displaced onto the suffering body of Christ as his side wound and that the Virgin’s womb was displaced onto the lap of God the Creator as his womb/orb.

²³⁷ Deuchler, Florens. “Looking at Bonne of Luxembourg’s Prayer Book.” *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, New Series, [1971], Vol. 29, No. 6, p. 267.

²³⁸ Walker, Paige M. “Medieval Female Spirituality and the Wound of Christ in Folio 331r of Bonne of Luxembourg’s Prayer Book”, Thesis, U. of C. Berkeley, 2012, p. 3.

Valois' colors of blue and gold are echoed in the side wound's patterned background connecting the Valois' royalty with Christ's divinity.²³⁹

Jean Le Noir mobilizes novel optical techniques in his handling of the side wound: its form facilitates its function.²⁴⁰ The scale and coloring of Christ's wound construct an image within an image [Detail, Figure 23]. The side wound's white outline enframes and separates it from the surrounding instruments of the Passion. The outlined wound together with its estranging rubrication cause it to float free of its pictorial moorings and project into the viewer's space. The wound's size and vividity convey its potency; the page is unable to contain it. The wound's gradations of color from its orange-hued edges to intense red are centered by its black slitted opening producing both an otherworldly effect in its relation to the page and a naturalistic spatial recession into depth. The wound's white outline oscillates with its black cave-like center – it appears to both advance and recede on the page. Tipped on its side, mandorla-like, the wound's morphology and coloration are explicitly vaginal. The artist's rendering of the side wound, the exquisitely executed *arma Christi*, the patterned background of the image, reveal a profound interest in spatial representation. Each of the page's elements, the vines and birds, the hybrid figure with a ladder on the top left, the curious figures and beasts in the bas-de-page, and the

²³⁹ Walker, [n. 238], p. 38.

²⁴⁰ For a detailed account of how the psalter develops themes of chivalry, virginity and identity or unity with Christ see Walker [n. 238]; and also see Deuchler, [n. 237] for themes of anti-Semitism see Lermack, Annette. "The Pivotal Role of the Two Fools Miniature in the Psalter of Bonne of Luxembourg." *Gesta*, 2008, Vol. 47 (2), pp. 79 – 98; Lewis, [n. 13]; Olson, Vibeke. "Chapter 14: Penetrating the Void:" Picturing the Wound in Christ's Side as a Performative Space." *Wounds and Wound Repair in Medieval Culture*, Tracy, Larissa and DeVries, Kelly, Eds. Brill, 2016, [pp. 313 – 339]; Sandler, Lucy Freeman. "The Study of Marginal Imagery: Past, Present, and Future." *Studies in Iconography*, 1997, Vol. 18, pp. 1 – 49.

ground line, play with notions of spatial depth and dimensions. Each of the image's marginal figures are multivalently iconographic. However, for the purpose of my visual analysis, I am limiting my focus to the spatial properties and operations of the isolated side wound.

The vaginal side wound's resolute three-dimensionality deploys an early and persuasive use of atmospheric perspective to achieve its oscillating effects, its dominating scale causes the page to pulse and throb. The spatial relations between the side wound and the delicately scaled *arma Christi* are indeterminate; the side wound is both in front of and behind Christ's empty tomb. The empty tomb depicted in the bottom left of the illumination is another representation of a space within a space. Jean Le Noir's execution of the tomb's spatiality is achieved through parallel lines and gradations of color from white to grey. On the opposite side of the vaginal wound the mouth of the bucket that held vinegar and bile on Calvary gapes open. The bucket's feet overlap the inner layer of the illumination's gold leaf frame projecting it into the viewer's space. The artist also plays with the notion of the image's ground by setting the base of the column on which Christ was flagellated below the ground-line created by the gold-leaf frame. While Longinus' spear, the cross, and the sponge-topped pole are arranged behind the tomb, the hammer, nails, pincer, and scourges float on the vertiginous, spiraling, swirling background pattern of blue and gold. The miniature's optical properties were designed to assist the viewer's contemplative devotion.²⁴¹

A prayer accompanying the image on the facing page states: "Blessed sweet Jesus Christ, I want to adore you, in your sweet wounds my sins are witnessed."²⁴² The text continues with praise for

²⁴¹ Didi-Huberman, [n. 14].

²⁴² Quoted in Lermack, [n. 240], p. 92.

the saving power of the blood from Christ's five wounds. The final lines of text read: "Glorious Lord the wounds of your body from which in five places the blood boiled out, shall comfort me in all places and hope and exile from permanent death. The side wound of which this is the size."²⁴³ Directly below the image the text states: "Show us most dear god, see the very great generosity when you vowed to suffer such distress for us."²⁴⁴ The side wound's scale, understood to be the precise size of Christ's wound magnified the wound's talismanic powers.²⁴⁵ As the last miniature in the psalter, the vaginal side wound was positioned to be a locus for meditation and prayer. As a wound and in its vaginal morphology it is a liminal space, a gateway between the viewer's secular space and sacred space.²⁴⁶ As an image within an image the side wound oscillates from the surface of the image to its illusionistic depths facilitating the viewer's visualization of penetrating the wound to achieve spiritual union with Christ. The side wound's placement directly above the combined coats of arms of the Luxembourgs' and Valois' constructs a visual dialogue between two shield-shaped objects. As Lucy Freeman Sandler observes of the Psalter's heraldic devices:

Marginal heraldry is the "portraiture" and sometimes the group portraiture of the late 13th and the 14th centuries. It identifies individuals, with or without associated representations in human form, and it associates individuals with each other, mapping out a social or geographical nexus, as for instance when marginal shields refer to marriages, to family dynasties, or to feudal allegiances.²⁴⁷

²⁴³ Lermack, [n. 240], p. 92.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁵ Deuchler, [n. 237], p. 277.

²⁴⁶ Olson, [n. 240], p. 316.

²⁴⁷ Sandler, [n. 240], p. 23.

As a synecdoche for Christ, the side wound operates like a heraldic device; it functions as a portrait of Christ. In numerous depictions of the isolated side wound Christ's essence is equated with the vagina. As an object of veneration, the isolated side wound was understood to have apotropaic power protecting women in childbirth.²⁴⁸ Thus, Bonne of Luxembourg, who gave birth to ten children, but would never witness female parturience visually validated, was tutored by text and image to meditate upon a vaginal shaped object and be grateful for Christ's generative, salvific powers. Further, the text accompanying the miniature implicated Bonne of Luxembourg in Christ's Passion, "...in your sweet wounds my sins are witnessed."²⁴⁹

At first glance the visual strategies of *Wounds of Christ with Symbols of the Passion*, [Figure 24], a diagrammatic colored woodcut, appear lacking in sophistication in comparison with the Bonne psalter's highly refined illumination. Three extant impressions from two different editions attest to the wood-cut's popularity.²⁵⁰ A reference to Pope Innocent VIII in two impressions in the wood-cut's xylographic inscriptions date the image to the period 1484 to 1492 while the dialect of its text suggests an origin in southeast Germany.²⁵¹ The image is an assemblage of sacred relics including the *Sudarium*, also called the Vernicle, Veronica veil, or *vera icon*.²⁵² Hans

²⁴⁸ Lewis, [n. 13], p. 216.

²⁴⁹ Lermack, [n. 240], p. 92.

²⁵⁰ Areford, David S. *The Viewer and the Printed Image*. London and New York: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2010, p. 238.

²⁵¹ *Ibid*, pp. 243 – 44.

²⁵² The origins of the *Sudarium*, also called the Vernicle, Veronica veil, and *vera icon*, and its status as an *acheiropoietos*, are discussed in more detail in connection with Figure 26 below.

Belting observes that the Veronica veil began to be included in *arma Christi* in the fourteenth century.²⁵³ The Veronica veil, an *acheiropoietos*, a Greek word meaning not made by human hands, was a sacred portrait that functioned as “...an agent of authenticity independent of the talents of a painter.”²⁵⁴ In this woodcut, Christ’s body is depicted as an assemblage of the five wounds inflicted during the Passion – his hands with their stigmata, the side wound, and his feet with their stigmata. Christ’s dismembered body parts demand the viewer’s participation in imagining Christ’s side wound as his body and his hands and feet as his limbs. The rubricated wound, depicted vertically, both mandorla-like and vaginal, dominates the image. Its spatial relation to the Veronica veil foregrounds the wound as it floats before the imprint of Christ’s bloodied face. The side wound’s pointed upper tip appears to pierce the image of Christ’s face. Bisected by objects arrayed along its central axis – three nails piercing the sacred heart, overlapped by a *titulus* bearing the anagram for Jesus of Nazareth King of the Jews – the wound is also transected by the horizontal arm of a cross. The vertical arm of the cross, inscribed with the names of the four evangelists, and seen from an oblique angle, penetrates the wound. The *titulus* above the cross occupies an ambiguous spatial relation with the cross; although the nails, sacred heart and *titulus* are depicted frontally, the cross is positioned at an oblique angle to the picture plane and seen from below. The angle of the cross leads the eye into the wound’s spatial recession, an effect heightened by the outlining and highlighting of the wound’s right edge and the shading of its left. The scale of the side wound, its equation with Christ’s body and its spatial

²⁵³ Belting, Hans. *Likeness and Presence. A History of the Image Before the Era of Art.* Jephcott, Edmund. [Trans.] Chicago and London: University of Toronto Press, 1994, p. 221.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p. 208.

recession confound notions of exterior and interior – opening Christ’s interior to the viewer’s gaze.

Augmenting the wood-cut’s multidimensionality is the shading of the banderoles flanking the wound. Shaded with horizontal bands at each end, the banderoles’ interior edges frame the wound, operating in a mode similar to the white outlining of the side wound in Bonne of Luxembourg’s Psalter [Figure 23], emphasizing the wound’s spatiality.

The left banderole is inscribed:

This is the length and width of Christ’s wound which was pierced in his side on the cross. Whoever kisses the wound with remorse and sorrow, also with devotion, will have as often as he does this, seven years indulgence from Pope Innocent.²⁵⁵

The right banderole is inscribed:

This little cross standing in Christ’s wound measured forty times makes the length of Christ in his humanity. Whoever kisses it with devotion shall be protected from sudden death or misfortune.²⁵⁶

Engaging the viewer’s spatial imagination, the woodcut’s inscriptions attest to the image’s magical numerical properties. The claims to exact measurement of Christ’s side wound and his height incorporate the concept of *autoptic* viewing, an eyewitness viewing, an assurance that the events depicted and described were witnessed, a guaranty of their authenticity. The woodcut offers the viewer multiple types of evidence. The precise measurements of Christ’s height and his side wound offer assurance of Christ’s presence in the image, physical evidence of Christ’s existence, of the wound inflicted by Longinus’s spear while Christ hung on the cross, and of the crucifixion itself.

²⁵⁵ Areford, [n. 250], p. 233.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p. 235.

To earn the woodcut's indulgence from purgatory and its apotropaic protection from sudden death and misfortune the viewer is instructed to meditate with remorse and sorrow. The woodcut's exchange of indulgences for the viewer's remorse and sorrow implicate the viewer in Christ's suffering and death. Further, to earn the woodcut's amuletic protection, physical obedience of a specific kind is demanded; the viewer is instructed to kiss the cross at the wound's center. To make the woodcut's inscriptions legible the viewer rotated the print sideways transforming the wound/vagina into lips that the viewer was instructed to kiss. The isolated wound demanded an intimate, embodied, interactive relationship with its viewer. The woodcut's visual and textual strategies participate in the manipulation of the viewer's response to an image that would, without an interpretive framework, be considered repugnant. The arrangement of the dismembered pieces of Christ's body in *The Measure of the Side Wound* function similarly to the texts analyzed by Sara Lipton that taught the beholder how to interpret the figuring of Christ as *Christus Patiens*. Christ's crucified hands reach out to embrace the viewer but instead of Christ's head leaning forward to kiss the beholder, Christ's wound/vagina/body transforms into a mouth. The wood-cut's inscriptions, rewarding sought after behaviors with indulgences and protection, regulate its reception. The wood-cut's potent magical properties are intensified by the depiction of the Veronica veil, the cloth imprinted with Christ's bodily fluids – his sweat and blood – constituting further evidence of Christ's physical existence and of the events of the Passion. The Veronica veil, due to its status as an *acheiropoietos* was understood to possess miraculous healing powers, even when it was reproduced as a print.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁷ A term applied to images which are claimed to be of miraculous origin. Murray and Murray, [n. 51], p. 3; Karr, Suzanne. "Marginal Devotions: A Newly Acquired Veronica Woodcut." *Yale University Art Gallery Bulletin*. 2002, p. 99; on the magical powers of a reproduction of the

4.1 The Veronica Veil and The Woman with The Issue of Blood

The miraculous powers of Christ's side wound are foregrounded in an illumination of the side wound on a cloth from a Cistercian Prayer Book dated c. 1440 [Figure 25]. This extraordinary illumination combines the mesmerizing optical strategies of the Bonne Psalter's side wound and the magico-religious potency inhering in the sacred relic, the Veronica veil, depicted in *The Wounds of Christ with Symbols of the Passion*, [Figure 24]. Like the Bonne Psalter's side wound, its optical strategies facilitate meditative union with the wound. As David Areford observes, an instability is produced by the spatial dimensions of the shallow gold diaper-patterned background and the deep recess at the wound's elongated black slitted center.²⁵⁸ Once again, Christ's side wound has been tipped onto its side increasing its resemblance to a vagina. Unlike depictions of the blood flowing from the lower edge of the horizontal side wound in images of *Christus Patiens* [Figure 18] in this image, the side wound bleeds from the vertical wound's bottom tip reinforcing its resemblance to a menstruating vagina.

The cloth on which the side wound is imprinted functions as frame, suggestive of the skin of Christ's body, a sacred textile relic, a contact relic created by physical contact with Christ's side wound, and a soiled menstrual cloth. In its similarity to the concept and function of the Veronica veil on which the blood and sweat of Christ's face was imprinted, the image also functions as a sacred portrait, an *acheiropoietos*, and as physical evidence of the existence of Christ's side

sudarium as a print see Olson, Vibeke. "Blood, sweat, tears, and milk, "Fluid" veneration, sensory contact, and corporeal presence in medieval devotional art." Kelley, Emily and Rivenbark, Elizabeth Richards [Ed.] *Binding the Absent Body in Medieval and Modern Art: "Abject, virtual and Alternate Bodies*, p. 14.

²⁵⁸ Areford, David S. "Reception" *Studies in Iconography; Special Issue Medieval Art History Today – Critical Terms*, 2012, Vol. 33, p. 76.

wound. The notion of the “true portrait” imprinted on a cloth engages with competing apocryphal legends of an Eastern and Western portrait of Christ on cloth. The legend of the Eastern portrait of Christ originates in the sixth century as the *Mandyllion*, a “true portrait” of Christ on cloth commissioned in Syria and taken to Constantinople.²⁵⁹ The second “true portrait” arises in the West sometime in the twelfth century. According to one version of the legend, a woman named Veronica standing on the roadside to Calvary offered her veil to Christ to wipe the sweat and blood from his face as he carried his cross. After the sack of Constantinople in 1204, the *Mandyllion* vanished and the second “true portrait” of Christ also known as the *Sudarium*, *Vernicle*, or Veronica veil, was enshrined in St. Peter’s in Rome.²⁶⁰ The name of the woman on the roadside to Calvary, Veronica, may be derived from the Latin words, *vera icon*, or true image.²⁶¹ Although not recorded in the Bible, the name Veronica is mentioned in the apocryphal *Acts of Pilate*, and later in de Voragine’s *The Golden Legend*. The Veronica veil legend was popularized by the Franciscans and became a favorite subject for artists.²⁶² *The Golden Legend* develops the tale of the miraculous healing power of the Veronica veil or shroud, which cured any person who looked upon it with devotion.²⁶³ A further link connects Veronica, the imprint of Christ’s bodily fluids on her veil, and a miracle involving Christ’s miraculous cure

²⁵⁹ Belting, [n. 253], p. 208.

²⁶⁰ Belting, [n. 253], p. 208; for another version of the legend see James, [n. 21], pp. 157 – 158.

²⁶¹ Giorgi, [n. 61], p. 363.

²⁶² Murray and Murray, [n. 28], pp. 557 – 558.

²⁶³ De Voragine, [n. 161], p. 214.

of the “woman with the issue of blood.” One of Christ’s miracles recorded in Matthew [9:20-23]; Luke [8:43-48]; and Mark [5: 25-29], is the cure of a woman who had been hemorrhaging for twelve years. The Apocryphal *Acts of Pilate* identify the “woman with the issue of blood” as Veronica.²⁶⁴ A commentary on the miraculous cure of the hemorrhaging woman in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* notes that as a result of the prohibitions imposed on menstruating women, a hemorrhaging woman would have been considered continuously unclean, a pariah, and shunned as a result [Leviticus 15:25-30].²⁶⁵ According to Leviticus, menstruating women contaminated everything they came in contact with during their menses and for eight days after its cessation. To be purified of their contamination women tendered offerings to a priest to “make atonement on [their] behalf before the Lord for [their] unclean discharge” [Leviticus 15:30]. The miraculous cure of the “woman with the issue of blood” was a popular subject in Christian art. Numerous images of the “woman with the issue of blood” depict her kneeling behind Christ and touching the hem of his garment while he holds his hand above her head in a gesture of blessing. However, as scholars have noted, there is a “remarkable lacuna in Christian iconography” as none of these images depict the uterine blood shed by the hemorrhaging woman.²⁶⁶ In representations of the woman whose defining feature was her continuous

²⁶⁴ In some of the apocryphal acts the name of the woman with the issue of the blood is Beronice or Bernice the Coptic form of the Latin Veronica, see James [n. 21], pp. 102, 183.

²⁶⁵ Coogan, [n. 20] pp. 164 – 165.

²⁶⁶ Baert, Barbara; Kusters, Liesbet, Sidgwick, Emma. “An Issue of Blood: The Healing of the Woman with the Haemorrhage in Early Medieval Visual Culture.” *Journal of Religion and Health*, 2012, Vol. 51, No. 3, p. 667.

hemorrhaging, there is an absence of any depiction of blood. Uterine blood is invisible in Western Christian visual culture except when it is displaced onto the male body.

Christ's miraculous cure of the "woman with the issue of blood" is a prototype of Christ's Passion. Women's menstrual blood, a consequence of the fall, required Christ's redemption of humankind by the shedding of his own blood on the cross.²⁶⁷ Women viewing the bleeding vaginal shape imprinted on a cloth were reminded of Eve's role in the fall, and of the Christian explanation for their own monthly "curse." This was the reason for their contaminated status during their menses, and why they suffered pain during labor and childbirth, explaining the necessity of venerating Christ's bleeding wound to redeem their sins. The medieval mind intimately connected Christ's side wound and menstrual blood: blood charms, incantations, and amulets containing images of Christ's side wound were worn to stop dangerously excessive flows of menstrual blood.²⁶⁸ As A.A. Barb has observed, Veronica's name is also associated with these charms against excessive menstrual flow.²⁶⁹ Through a carefully calibrated interpretive framework, a depiction of an imprint of a menstruating vagina on a cloth, an image that the medieval mind would ordinarily find repulsive and impossible to visualize, was transformed into a sacred "true portrait" of Christ.

²⁶⁷ See Easton, [n. 13], p. 398.

²⁶⁸ Rubin, [n.219], p. 305.

²⁶⁹ Barb, A. A. "St. Zacharias the Prophet and Martyr: A Study in Charms and Incantations." *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 1948, Vol. 11, p. 43.

4.2 The Cosmic Wound

When a small-scale devotional portrait of the Virgin and Child tentatively attributed to Pietro di Niccolo da Orvieto [Figure 26] dated c. 1400 in Cambridge's Fitzwilliam Museum was cleaned in preparation for an exhibition a painting on its reverse side [Figure 27] was discovered.²⁷⁰ Conservators at the Fitzwilliam Museum's Hamilton Kerr Institute believe the panel's verso depicts Christ's side wound.²⁷¹ Uncategorizable, uncontainable, abstract, intensely colorful, and painterly this image explodes the categories of *vesica piscis*, mandorla, womb, vagina, wound, and cosmos. Juxtaposed with a traditional portrait of the Virgin and Child on the recto this blazing cosmic wound is revelatory. Although the two paintings – one an archaizing portrait of the Virgin and child and the other – a vivid abstraction – appear centuries apart stylistically, conservators confirm that they were painted at the same time.²⁷² The stylistic contrasts between the two works – their use of color, application of paint, and approach to their subject – are extreme.

The juxtaposition of the traditional portrait of the Virgin and Child with such a vivid and, to the modern eye, abstract painting is arresting. As Georges Didi-Huberman and Herbert L. Kessler have shown, contemplation of gold grounds, swirling designs, and vivid abstractions were

²⁷⁰ I am grateful to my thesis supervisor Dr. Joseph Monteyne for bringing this double-sided work to my attention.

²⁷¹ “While cleaning off centuries of grime and clumsy restoration work, conservators at the museum's Hamilton Kerr Institute found that the reverse panel featured a vivid depiction of what some experts believe is Christ's crucifixion wound. Quoted in *The Times*, March 13, 2017 and in BBC News March 13, 2017.

²⁷² Rupert Featherstone, A.C.R. determined that the image of the wound was genuine and not a later addition and was painted in the fifteenth century. Icon the Institute of Conservation, News, April 11, 2017, <http://icon.org.uk>.

utilized during the Middle Ages and in the Renaissance to activate a transcendental spiritual engagement with the image.²⁷³ The Virgin's solemnity, the highly stylized modeling of her facial features, olive skin coloring, and elongated hand and fingers, participate in a Byzantine inflected style. The child, depicted as a miniature man, is similarly Byzantine. The double portrait, reminiscent of a style predating Cimabue's and Duccio's paintings of the Virgin and Child a century earlier, is iconic. The azurite blues and vivid reds of the Virgin's maphorion, the faint pinkish shimmer of her nimbus, and the paler blue of the Child's robe are translated into the verso's pulsating whorls of unmediated color. The wound's elliptical shape stretched diagonally across the panel is only partially captured within its frame. Like the isolated side wounds depicted in Figures 22 – 25 the artist's visual strategies construct the wound as convulsive and uncontainable. Pietro di Niccolo da Orvieto achieved his optical effects with color, paint application, brush strokes, and the wound's uncanny diagonal orientation. One end of the pink wound touches the frame's side edge, while its top outer edge is brutally severed by the frame. At its outer edge, brush strokes of cool blues of different intensities are streaked with pink, violet, and orange creating elliptical movement. Dabs of paint thickly applied in rough, rapid brush strokes heighten the impression of dynamic movement, of spinning through the atmosphere. Strokes of vivid salmon pink swirl around the central vortex appearing closer to the viewer than the paler pink gradating to the color of orange red flames on the wound's opposite side. A dash of white on the wound's bottom tip suggests incandescence. In the wound's center, a whitish stripe juxtaposed against a dash of dark blue gives the appearance of recession into

²⁷³ Didi-Huberman, [n. 14], Kessler, Herbert L. *Seeing Medieval Art*, University of Toronto Press, 2011, p. 29.

depth. The whitish stripe stippled with pinkish red reveals eruption-like explosions, flames, or lesions deep within the wound's matrix. The blurring, swirling mass suggests an anamorphosis, and the cosmic wound refuses to come completely into focus. The overall effect is of a mass of energy hurtling through the cosmos depicting the universe's origin.

Interestingly, the cosmic side wound's pictorial mode also resembles painted marble, participating in the artistic convention of painting fictive marble or stone on the reverse of panel portrait paintings. Art historians refer to the verso of Pietro di Nicollo's panel as "feigned" or "fictive marble" without further visual analysis.²⁷⁴ I argue, rather, that it is the panel's resemblance to fictive or feigned marble that is significant: marble carried potent symbolic valences for classical, late antique, and Christian beholders.²⁷⁵ In the paintings of the Virgin in the cave analyzed in Chapter 2, caves, slabs of stone, and mountains were metaphors for the Virgin, signifying procreation, generation, and the origins of the world. Greek, Roman, and Christian thought understood the world to have begun with water.²⁷⁶ Ancient ideograms and medieval *mappae mundi* showed the inhabitable world [*oikoumene*] encircled by the mythical Oceanus.²⁷⁷ Marble, understood to be a "metamorphosis of water into stone" was connected in

²⁷⁴ Corry, Maya, Howard, Deborah and Laven, Mary [Eds] *Madonnas and Miracles: The Holy Home in Renaissance Italy*. London: Philip Wilson Publishers, 2017, p. 3; Brundin, Abigail, Howard, Deborah and Laven, Mary [Eds] *The Sacred Home in Renaissance Italy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018, p. 73.

²⁷⁵ Barry, Fabio. "Walking on Water: Cosmic Floors in Antiquity and the Middle Ages." *The Art Bulletin*, 2007, Vol. 89 (4), p.630; Kinney, Dale. "The Concept of Spolia" in *A Companion to Medieval Art: Romanesque and Gothic in Northern Europe*. Rudolph, Conrad [Ed], Blackwell Publishing, 2006, p. 234; Didi-Huberman, [n. 14], p. 31.

²⁷⁶ Barry, [n. 275], p. 631.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p. 634.

antiquity and the Middle Ages with the world's origins.²⁷⁸ Book matched marble sheets cut to display interior veins forming repeating patterns were prized in temple and church decoration. Church floors constructed of marble cut to form patterns resembling waves were understood to display marble's physical properties – purified earth suspended in water – and were described by contemporaries as resembling frozen or petrified seas.²⁷⁹ Marble was also regarded as a physical expression of God's creativity in nature: "The idea that marble is the result of nature acting as an artist became a familiar one."²⁸⁰ Patterns formed within marble produced not only waves but also figural images: in *De Pictura*, Leon Battista Alberti refers to figures of "centaurs and bearded kings" in marble revetments.²⁸¹ Artists in antiquity challenged their mastery of technique by imitating marble in trompe l'oeil wall paintings.

Giotto is credited with reviving the antique tradition of trompe-l'oeil stone in his decoration of the Arena Chapel.²⁸² The Arena Chapel's multiple illusionistic techniques include trompe-l'oeil *coretti*, architectonic paintings appearing to be openings into illusionistic rooms, personifications

²⁷⁸ Barry, [n. 275], p. 631.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p. 630.

²⁸⁰ Jones, Roger. "Mantegna and Materials." *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance*, 1987, 2, p. 84.

²⁸¹ Alberti, Leon Battista. *On Painting*. Spencer, John A. [Trans] New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1966, p. 67.

²⁸² Ebert-Schifferer, Sybille. "Trompe l-Oeil: The Underestimated Trick: Five Centuries of Trompe l'Oeil Painting. Exhibition Catalogue, Washington: National Art Gallery, 2003, pp. 22 – 24; Didi-Huberman, [n. 14], p. 81; Wolf, Norbert. *Giotto di Bondone 1267 – 1337 The Renewal of Painting*. Hohenzollern: Taschen, 2006, p. 40.

of the Virtues and Vices in *grisaille* imitating sculptures mounted in recessed niches, fictive frames of mosaic inlay and multiple panels of illusionistic marble. Roger Jones connects the use of painted marble panels in artistic programs such as Giotto's Arena Chapel to the convention of painting fictive marble on the reverse of panel portrait paintings like Pietro di Niccolo's *Virgin and Child*.²⁸³ Didi-Huberman has analyzed the previously unexamined use of fictive marble in late medieval Italian painting. Didi-Huberman's analysis of Fra Angelico's frescoes in what is now the Museo San Marco in Florence [1438 – 1450], Andrea Castagno's marble panels painted behind his *Last Supper* in S. Apollonia's refectory [1445 – 1450] also in Florence, and other Italian artists including Giotto's fictive marble panels, reveals the widespread use of fictive stone, especially marble, in Italian painting. Until recently, art history's dismissal of non-figural art as merely decorative meant that the operation, contexts, and relationship of fictive marble panels with holy portraits were ignored.²⁸⁴

For Didi-Huberman devout art's purpose is to signify the ineffable, the unfigurable, by utilizing the vestige or trace rather than the figure.²⁸⁵ He utilizes the example of four blotched and splattered panels that form a non-figural zone of fictive marble below the figures in Fra Angelico's fresco, *Madonna of the Shadows*, [Figure 28]. The fictive marble panel's splatters and speckles, achieved by flinging paint onto the surface rather than applying it with a brush, are deliberately undecipherable, disrupting vision and leading the beholder to "...a labyrinth of

²⁸³ Jones, [n. 280], p. 75.

²⁸⁴ Didi-Huberman, [n. 14], p. 28.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid*, p. 49.

evocations, analogies, infinite associations.”²⁸⁶ The conjunction of the figural or resemblant with the non-figural or dissemblant produces a dialectic which disturbs representation to conjure up a presence, to point “...toward the space of a mystery.”²⁸⁷ Fictive marble’s multi-colored materiality creates “surfaces for contemplation,” shifting the viewer’s vision from the carnal eye to an anagogic gaze.²⁸⁸ Significantly, Didi-Huberman develops an association between the values marble held for the medieval imaginary and the figuring of the Virgin. Beginning with Giotto, Didi-Huberman observes the incorporation of marble patterns in the foreground of Italian paintings of the Virgin and Child.²⁸⁹ In a fascinating analysis of Agnolo Gaddi’s *Annunciation* [c. 1385 – 1395] in Prato’s cathedral, Didi-Huberman deciphers a fictive marble panel painted on the exterior wall of the Virgin’s bedchamber as “[a] pictorial index of Mary’s hymen, which was both intact and passed through, impregnated.”²⁹⁰ Agnolo Gaddi’s fictive marble panel [Figure 29], that Didi-Huberman interprets as the Virgin Mary’s hymen, bears a striking resemblance to Pietro di Nicollo da Orvieto’s cosmic side wound [Figure 27]. In both Pietro di Nicollo’s panel and Gaddi’s fresco fictive marble operates as pictorial code for the Virgin’s vagina.

The double-sidedness of domestic devotional panels such as Pietro di Niccolo da Orvieto’s *Virgin and Child* and their handling for ritual religious practice constructed an intimate,

²⁸⁶ Didi-Huberman, [n. 14], p. 100.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid*, p. 55 and 90.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid*, p. 56 and 100.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid*, p. 81.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 193 – 195.

embodied relationship between the holy bodies in the portrait, the painted marble verso, and their beholders. Maya Corry suggests small devotional panels such as Pietro di Niccolo's were hung with the portraits facing the wall and turned to face the beholder only for daily religious observances.²⁹¹ The painted marble verso could function like a door or veil before a sacred portrait heightening the moment of disclosure.²⁹² Citing Didi-Huberman, Abigail Brundin suggests that the verso of the *Virgin and Child's* "contemplative potency" would have aided devotional practices.²⁹³ Durer's extraordinary double-sided panel combines a portrait of Christ as the Man of Sorrows on the recto [Figure 30] with a painted stone/side wound on the verso [Figure 31]. Durer's multiple artistic interventions in the iconography of the Man of Sorrows genre – Christ's unique pose, the circular arrangement of Christ's limbs, and particularly Christ's direct visual engagement with the viewer – invest Durer's Christ with an uncanny agency. The stigmata of Christ's left hand marks the parapet with blood – a hand print – and blood spatters over Christ's painted skin as if he is painting himself with his own blood. Unsurprisingly, given Durer's artistic preoccupations, his *Man of Sorrows* transforms Christ's Passion into an articulation of the creative act of both printing and painting. Although as Beate Fricke observes the fictive stone's "flaming spectacle of color," on the panel's verso draws attention to the artist's act of creation it is in my view overshadowed by the portrait's mesmerizing

²⁹¹ Corry, [n. 274], p. 4.

²⁹² Brundin, [n. 274], p. 73.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*

strangeness.²⁹⁴ While Pietro di Niccolo da Orvieto's trompe l'oeil frame surrounding the anamorphosis of the cosmic wound, his paint application, vivid colours, and multiple painterly techniques, foreground artistic mastery it is the collision of archaizing portrait and abstract wound that break open new discourses. Although Corry, Brundin, and other scholars refer to the newly cleaned and restored verso of Pietro di Niccolo da Orvieto's *Virgin and Child* as "feigned" or "fictive marble," its non-mimetic pictorial mode, like Fra Angelico's fictive marble panels, puts it in a discrete visual category. The foregrounding of medium, brushwork, paint application, pictorial marks, and the paint's materiality privilege its artistic technique. In contrast, trompe-l'oeil depictions of marble eliminate artistic technique to privilege illusionism.²⁹⁵ Pietro di Niccolo da Orvieto's juxtaposition of an archaizing double portrait and a blazing cosmic abstraction jolt the viewer's powers of apprehension, speaking beyond words, rendering visible the side wound's trajectory in medieval visual culture. The severed wound stretched and displayed in tight close up makes visible the wound's double excision. Wrenched from its original embodied contexts and triumphantly displayed, I argue that the cosmic side wound mobilizes a *spolia* aesthetic, and this can only enrich our understanding of the operation of the isolated side-wound images earlier examined, including the Bonne Psalter [Figures 23 and 24], *The Wounds of Christ with Symbols of the Passion* [Figure 24], and *The Side Wound on Cloth* [Figure 25]. Indeed, Didi-Huberman's use of the concept of the pictorial index or "vestigium" to describe Fra Angelico's fictive marble panels "denot[ing] both destruction and permanence" and

²⁹⁴ Fricke, Beate. "Artifex and Opifex: The Medieval Artist. Conrad, Rudolph, [Ed] *Companion to Medieval Art: Romanesque and Gothic in Northern Europe*. John Wiley and Sons, Second Edition, 2019, p. 59.

²⁹⁵ Ebert-Schifflerer, [n. 282], p. 28.

his vocabulary of violence, ruins, displacement, movement, shifting, and translation touches on some of *spolia*'s essential elements.²⁹⁶

4.3 The Image of the Side Wound as *Spolia*

Spolia proves to be a further fertile interpretive framework for investigating the operation of images of the isolated side wound. *Spolium*, the singular of *spolia*, is defined as “the spoil of an animal, i.e. the skin or hide of an animal stripped off.”²⁹⁷ The term's earliest use in a hunting context, the skin or hide as the trophy of the hunt, was later adapted to military contexts to refer to the armor stripped off the enemies' corpses, and more generally to the booty or spoils of war.²⁹⁸ *Spolia* can convey a violent and bloody taking of booty as trophies to display as a public expression of power.²⁹⁹ The term *spolia* was first used in an art historical context to refer to reused antiquities in the sixteenth century.³⁰⁰ As Dale Kinney notes, antiquity used the term *spolia* literally or metonymically whereas contemporary art historians deploy the term

²⁹⁶ Didi-Huberman, [n. 14], p. 21 and p. 48.

²⁹⁷ Lewis, Charlton and Short, Charles [Eds] *A Latin Dictionary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 1745.

²⁹⁸ Geymonat, Ludovico V. “The Syntax of *Spolia* in Byzantine Thessalonike” in *Approaches to Byzantine Architecture and its Decoration*. Johnson, Mark J. and Ousterhout, Robert, and Papalexandrou, Amy [Eds], Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2012, p. 47.

²⁹⁹ Wharton, Annabel J. “The Tribune Tower: *Spolia* as Despoliation” in Brilliant, Richard and Kinney, Dale. [Eds] *Reuse Value Spolia and Appropriation in Art and Architecture from Constantine to Sherrie Levine*. London: Routledge, 2011, ebook 2016, p. 179.

³⁰⁰ For a historiography of the term in an art historical context see Kinney, Dale. “The Concept of *Spolia*” in *A Companion to Medieval Art: Romanesque and Gothic in Northern Europe*. Rudolph, Conrad [Ed], Blackwell Publishing, 2006, pp. 233 – 252.

metaphorically.³⁰¹ Any artifact taken from one cultural or chronological setting and inserted into a recognizably different context can fit within the contemporary concept of *spolia*.³⁰² In the last three decades, the field of *spolia* studies has expanded to include notions of appropriation, displacement, identity and gender theft.³⁰³ A fascinating example of *spolia* involving both gender theft and displacement is the grafting of an antique lapis lazuli portrait of an imperial female head onto the body of a headless eleventh century crucified Christ, the so-called Cross of Herimann.³⁰⁴ Carved gems and precious stones were routinely despoiled from their original sites for reuse: marble's scarcity, status as a luxury stone, and its ability to produce "aesthetic wonderment" made it a preeminent object for plunder and reuse.³⁰⁵

Spolia often involve a transgressive, appropriative act, the re-presentation of materials translated from different cultures, geographies, or chronologies. The term translation engages with the notions of taking and transferring of objects from one condition, language, or chronology, and their re-presentation in another. Translation turns one language into another, expounds the significance of something not expressed in words; and expresses one thing in terms of something else.³⁰⁶ *Spolia* involves two distinct artistic or architectural contexts; "[f]or *spolia* to succeed as

³⁰¹ Kinney, Dale. "*Spolia, Damnatio and Renavatio Memoriae.*" *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome*, [1977], Vol. 42, p. 120.

³⁰² *Ibid.*

³⁰³ See Flood, [n. 15], p. 168.

³⁰⁴ Kinney, [n. 275], p. 118.

³⁰⁵ Kinney, [n. 300], p. 234.

³⁰⁶ Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles, [n. 126], p. 3329.

the evidence of the swing between two sites the original source cannot be fully obscured if the newly combined elements are to have meaningful saliency in the present.”³⁰⁷ In depictions representing the isolated side wound vertically homage is paid to its original unstated context as vagina while estranging it from its stated context as Christ’s more horizontally oriented side wound, magnifying its visual potency. Pietro di Niccolo da Orvieto’s representation of the wound between a vertical and horizontal orientation, its anamorphosis or in-betweenness, ignites multiple registers producing its “meaningful saliency in the present.” The wound’s vivid colors, convulsive brush work, and temporal dynamism, mobilize its cosmic multivocality.

To paraphrase Paolo Liverani, the very nature of *spolia* is to produce a gap or scar in the object’s original context or condition.³⁰⁸ The appropriation and displacement of the visual language of female creative materiality leaves a gap, a lack, an absence, in the medieval visual record. The display of conquered *spolia* by the victor also operates as an expression of status and power.³⁰⁹ Inhering in the appropriation and displacement of the Virgin’s creative materiality onto Christ’s body in images of the isolated side wound, are *spolia*’s potent elements – a shift of objects or materials from one context to another, plunder or violent taking, blood, display, and empowerment. In early Christian and medieval cities *spolia* marked thresholds or liminal spaces

³⁰⁷ Flood, [n. 15], pp. 168 – 169.

³⁰⁸ Liverani, Paolo. “Reading Spolia in Late Antiquity and Contemporary Perception.” in Brilliant, Richard and Kinney, Dale. [Eds] *Reuse Value Spolia and Appropriation in Art and Architecture from Constantine to Sherrie Levine*. London: Routledge, 2011, ebook 2016, p. 40.

³⁰⁹ Geymonat, [n.298], p. 59.

such as gateways or entries.³¹⁰ Prized for its apotropaic power *spolia* was understood to protect those within the walls it ornamented and to give warning to those outside.³¹¹ As discussed, the vagina figured as *vesica piscis* was understood to carry apotropaic power in pre-Christian times and infiltrated Christian visual space as the mandorla.³¹² As the mandorla the vaginal shaped aureole held sacred valences protecting souls in glory.³¹³ Medieval audiences were taught that apotropaic power inhered in images of the isolated side wound in psalters, illuminated manuscripts, woodcuts, and devotional paintings protecting those who prayed to and kissed the wound with “remorse and sorrow” from sudden death or misfortune.³¹⁴ In the case of the *Wounds of Christ with Symbols of the Passion* [Figure 24] kissing and praying to the isolated side wound also granted seven years indulgence from purgatory from Pope Innocent VIII.³¹⁵ Like the apotropaic *spolia* trophies displayed around gates of cities, Christ’s wound marked a threshold, a liminal space, a gateway to salvation. The small-scale devotional portrait of the Virgin and Child with the incandescent cosmic wound on its verso tells the story of the plunder of the Virgin’s expressive potential to construct Christ as the mother of humankind and the creator of the

³¹⁰ See Flood, Finnbar Barry. “Image Against Nature: *Spolia* as *Apotropaia* in Byzantium and the dar al-Islam.” *The Medieval History Journal*, 2006, Vol. 9(1), p. 149.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*

³¹² See Inman [n. 29], p. 66; Ross, [n.32], p. 142; Naumburg, [n. 33], p. 439 and Pearson, [n. 33], p. 80.

³¹³ Murray and Murray, [n. 28], p. 300.

³¹⁴ “remorse and sorrow” is quoted from the xylographic text on the woodcut the *Wounds of Christ with Symbols of the Passion*, [Figure 24].

³¹⁵ From the text on the left banderole of the woodcut, see Areford, [n. 250], p. 233.

cosmos. Like a pelt or hide, a trophy of the hunt to display on the wall, Pietro di Niccolo da Orvieto's painterly sleight of hand re-presents a plundered vagina for the viewer's veneration.

The audacity is breathtaking.

Chapter 5: The Swooning Virgin and The Male Pictorial Body as Evidentiary Document – *Doubting Thomas, Doubting Jerome, and Doubting Salome*

5.1 The Virgin’s Swoon on Calvary

As depictions of Christ’s suffering on Calvary became more gruesomely graphical in the later Middle Ages, Amy Neff traces a corresponding escalation in the depiction of the Virgin’s grief.³¹⁶ Neff charts the Virgin’s response on Calvary from one of stoic acceptance to *lo spasimo*, the Virgin’s grief-stricken swoon.³¹⁷ Neff asserts, based upon her detailed analysis of both textual and visual imagery, that the Virgin’s fainting on Calvary “concerns childbirth labor...”³¹⁸ The Virgin’s collapse on Calvary has no textual foundation in the Gospels, her presence on Calvary is mentioned only cursorily in the Gospel of John which makes it very clear that the Virgin stood on Calvary:

“Meanwhile, standing near the cross was his mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, “Woman, here is your son.” Then he said to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.”³¹⁹

According to the Gospel of John, the Virgin stood among her family members and beside a disciple on Calvary. The New Revised Standard Version of the Oxford Bible’s annotation on this passage states that Jesus’s brief dialogue on Calvary with his mother and his disciple was not

³¹⁶ Neff, [n. 1], pp. 254 – 61.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 254.

³¹⁹ Coogan, [n. 20], John 19:25 – 27.

intended to elevate his mother's status but that of John the Evangelist, "the disciple Jesus loved."³²⁰ I would like to suggest here that even though a new concept developed in theological texts that the swooning Virgin on Calvary was like a second childbirth, and for the first time she was suffering a pain akin to childbirth, artists were limited in their ability to visually express this concept since for so long they had avoided portraying the Virgin in childbirth.

Initially, the imagery of the Virgin swooning on Calvary was controversial not least because it contradicted the Gospel of John. The historian of Christianity, Rachel Fulton notes that there were occasional depictions of the Virgin's swoon in Byzantine art from the late eleventh century.³²¹ The earliest examples of the swoon in the West began to appear between 1250 and 1270 and in the second half of the thirteenth century images of the Crucifixion with a fainting Virgin proliferated.³²² Theologians deliberated over the implications of the swoon and whether it implied a defect in the Virgin's character.³²³ At issue was whether or not the Virgin, who was "full of grace" could experience such grief at the death of her son so as to cause her to lose control of her body without impeding her rational apprehension of the significance of the passion.³²⁴ Theologians were divided on whether or not the Virgin's swoon was canonical.³²⁵

³²⁰ Coogan, [n. 20], p. 179.

³²¹ Fulton, Rachel. *From Passion to Judgment*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2002, p. 536.

³²² Neff, [n. 1], p. 257.

³²³ Hamburgh, [n. 16], p. 45.

³²⁴ Cajetan, *Magister Sacrae Theologiae*, quoted in Hamburgh, [n. 16], p. 46.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*

Christ's few cryptic words in the Gospel of John were, however, open to interpretation and the church expanded the words "here is your son" to develop a "theology of motherhood on Calvary..."³²⁶ The notion of the Virgin's "second childbirth labor on Calvary" is developed in the Benedictine, Dominican, and Franciscan writings of Rupert of Deutz, Albertus Magnus, Saint Anthony of Padua, Saint Bonaventura, Julian of Norwich and others.³²⁷ The words in the Gospel of John were enlarged to apply "the motherhood of Mary" not to just the disciple John but "to all the disciples of her Son and eventually the church determined that the birth of redemption for sinners is "not only through the death of Christ but through the *agonia* of the mother, who does not suffer the pains of childbirth until Calvary."³²⁸ The Benedictine Abbot Rupert of Deutz's commentary on the succinct account in the Gospel of John provides an example of the textual imagery developed to describe the Virgin's second childbirth labor on Calvary:

At the foot of the cross, [Mary] is truly a woman and truly a mother and at this hour, she truly suffers the pains of childbirth. When Jesus was born, she did not suffer like other mothers: now, however, she suffers, she is tormented and full of sorrow, because her hour has come....in the Passion of her only Son, the Blessed Virgin gave birth to the salvation of all mankind: in effect she is the mother of all mankind.³²⁹

Since the Virgin's actual childbirth labor is invisible in Western visual culture, and medieval theologians "universally agreed that the Virgin did not suffer labor pains at the miraculous birth of Christ"³³⁰ what was the church's motivation for developing the theme of the Virgin's second

³²⁶ Neff, [n. 1], p. 265.

³²⁷ *Ibid*, p. pp. 254 – 256; Gertsman, [n. 2], pp. 89 – 91.

³²⁸ Hamburg, [n. 16], p. 51.

³²⁹ Rupert of Deutz quoted in Neff, [n. 1], p. 256.

³³⁰ Neff, [n. 1], p. 255.

childbirth on Calvary? Art historian Harvey Hamburg argues that the Virgin's swoon became of the "utmost theological importance."³³¹ In discussing the imagery of the fainting Hamburg contextualizes its significance for the Virgin's role on Calvary, and thus that of the church as well:

The imagery proceeds from some basic tenets of Catholic Marian theology: [1] that Mary is understood as the figure of the church itself; [2] that through her participation on Calvary she has been seen as our *co-redemptrix* with Christ; and [3] that the image of the *lo spasimo* is explained by the dual notions of *compassio* and the pain of childbirth under the cross which connect decisively with the first two concepts.³³²

The church's utilization of the Virgin as the embodiment of the church, a concept developed in early Christianity, made her expanded role on Calvary, "[h]er share in salvation ... equivalent to that of the church."³³³ Neff puts it this way: "The Virgin's role as *Mater Ecclesiae* was enlarged to support the church's authority."³³⁴ In other words, the church manipulated the Virgin's role on Calvary through textual and visual imagery and created another way to expand its own role in salvation to buttress its authority. The Virgin was capable of suffering pain when the church determined that it was useful for her to suffer pain and to a degree and in a manner the church deemed appropriate.

Rupert of Deutz's theological conceit of the Virgin's second childbirth labor on Calvary is much more susceptible to textual exegesis than it is to visual representation. To depict the Virgin's

³³¹ Hamburg, [n. 16], p. 51.

³³² *Ibid.*

³³³ *Ibid.*

³³⁴ Neff, [n. 1], p. 262.

childbirth labor on Calvary artists represented the Virgin collapsing into the arms of her attendants, a swoon that quotes "... an antique iconography of childbirth from Classical and Hellenistic periods."³³⁵ Neff demonstrates that the Virgin's fainting gesture on Calvary is a trope for childbirth labor that was deployed in images of the Virgin's mother, St. Anne giving birth to the Virgin herself.³³⁶ The motif of a woman swooning into the arms of attendants is, as Neff admits, equally consistent with the onset of childbirth labor or the overwhelming grief of compassion at the death of a loved one. As Neff states: "...childbirth imagery in the Swoon is not an alternate to the imagery of the *compassio* but is, rather a complement to it."³³⁷

A key thesis in Neff's article is that in images such as Rogier van der Weyden's *Descent from the Cross*, c. 1435 [Figure 32] there is an exact "parallelism" between Christ's dead body and the Virgin's swooning body.³³⁸ This notion of the parallelism between their two bodily attitudes is significant because Neff claims that in images relying on parallelism "[t]he visual parallel manifests parallel experiences."³³⁹ In her visual analysis of Rogier's *Descent from the Cross* Neff states:

...the pallor and limp pose of the Virgin exactly repeat those of Christ in death. The idea was expressed earlier in the Middle Ages as well, in images like the mid-thirteenth century *Crucifixion* from a diptych by the Oblate Master, where Mary's drooping head echoes

³³⁵ Neff, [n. 1], p. 258.

³³⁶ *Ibid.*

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 261.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 255.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*

Christ's. The visual parallel manifests parallel experiences. By sharing Christ's suffering and death, Mary takes part in Christ's salvation of mankind.³⁴⁰

For the purposes of my visual analysis of this image I draw attention to Neff's claim that the "pallor and limp pose of the Virgin exactly repeat those of Christ in death." I should note that other art historians have similarly opined that "...in collapsing [the Virgin's] body assumes an attitude almost identical with that of her son."³⁴¹ In Harvey Hamburg's analysis of the bodily attitudes in Rogier's *Descent from the Cross* the Virgin's collapse is "precisely paralleling that of her Son."³⁴² Although the Virgin's body parallels Christ's bodily attitude, Rogier's juxtaposition of their two figures dramatizes the different ways they are presented to the viewer. Christ's face is ashen, the crown of thorns piercing his forehead and ear cause blood to drip down his face and into his ear, a growth of greyish stubble appears on his chin and cheeks, and his head slumps lifelessly onto his shoulder [Figure 33]. The Virgin's face is marmoreal as befits a swoon, but her head does not droop, it is vertical, held erect by her living body. Christ's almost naked body leaks blood; his bleeding, swollen and deeply gashed side wound, is distinctly vaginal [Figure 34]. Rogier's handling of Christ's flowing blood is particularly suggestive of childbirth labor – a rivulet of red courses over his torso, across his abdomen, under his loincloth, and drips down his legs.³⁴³ Christ's naked body, marked with the blood of parturition is uncannily sensuous,

³⁴⁰ Neff, [n. 1], p. 255.

³⁴¹ von Simson, Otto G. "Compassio and Co-redemptio in Roger van der Weyden's *Descent from the Cross*. *The Art bulletin*, 1953, Vol. 35 (1), p. 11.

³⁴² Hamburg, [n. 16], p. 50.

³⁴³ Leo Steinberg's theological interpretation of the depiction of blood running from Christ's side wound to his groin connects Christ's first sacrifice, his infant circumcision, with his last sacrifice, the blood shed from his side wound by Longinus' spear during the Passion. For

vulnerable, feminized. Rogier's presentation of Christ to the viewer has an almost unbearable materiality – the viewer is witness to the bloody process of childbirth/salvation. Christ's body, centers the image, draped before the tau cross, in a panel that also takes the form of the tau cross, and is proffered for the viewer's consumption – like the consecrated host. The Eucharistic effect is deliberate: in its original site for the high altar of the chapel of Our Lady Outside the Walls in Louvain, "Rogier's altarpiece...would have served each day as a backdrop to ['the climactic moment of the Mass'] the elevation of the Holy Sacrament."³⁴⁴ In comparison, the presentation of the Virgin's body, lower and off-center, is a faint echo of Christ's. For Otto von Simpson, Rogier's depiction of the Virgin "...evokes, in striking and dramatic manner, the Virgin's supreme dignity as fifteenth century theology had come to formulate it: her share in the work of Redemption; more precisely her dignity as *co-redemptrix* in virtue of her *compassio* on Calvary."³⁴⁵ I argue that because the Virgin's body is expected to convey "supreme dignity," her bodily attitude and her erect head, are incapable of paralleling Christ's. In fact, her precise bodily attitude and the position of her legs obscured as they are by her voluminous draperies cannot be seen at all.

There is a large gap, I suggest, between the Benedictine, Dominican and Franciscan textual imagery promoting the Virgin's swoon as a second childbirth labor on Calvary and its visual

Steinberg representations that couple Christ's first and last wounds were offered to the viewer as proof of Christ's dual nature as God and human, his humanation. Steinberg, [n. 84], p. 115.

³⁴⁴ Powell, Amy. "The Errant Image" *Art History*, 2006, Vol. 29(4), pp. 542 – 544.

³⁴⁵ von Simson, [n. 340], p. 11.

expression.³⁴⁶ The Virgin's fully clothed, unscathed body is incapable of manifesting a parallel experience with Christ's almost naked, dead, and bloody body. Artists depicting the Virgin's second childbirth labor on Calvary were triply hampered: her first childbirth labor was invisible, her second childbirth labor is metaphorical, and the visual techniques available to depict Christ's crucifixion – a rupturing, bleeding, contorted, dead body – are incompatible with the Virgin's gender, modesty, and dignity. Rogier's depiction of the Virgin's collapse is decorous: not only is she fully clothed but neatly dressed. In comparison, the Magdalene on the tableau's far right, writhes with grief, contorting her body, her arms akimbo, wringing her hands, her legs bent, her back arched, her face bathed in tears. Further, her body's violent movement has detached her neck cloth from her dress and her violet cloak is falling from her body.³⁴⁷ Penny Howell Jolly develops a convincing analysis of Rogier's depiction of the Magdalene as the perfect exemplar of "the redeemed penitent."³⁴⁸ In Jolly's analysis the Magdalene's posture and dress, particularly the pictorial convention of the loosened stays over her gently swelling abdomen, and her belt's clasp labeled "IHESVSMARIA" [Bride of Christ] construct the Magdalene as metaphorically

³⁴⁶ In his study of late medieval Netherlandish images Reindert L. Falkenburg comes to a similar conclusion about the divergence between textual and pictorial imagery of the Virgin on Calvary. Falkenburg concludes that the images that express the Virgin's grief are more ambiguous than the medieval devotional texts and that the visual imagery of her grief, unlike some textual imagery, is usually within the bounds of restraint. Falkenburg, Reindert L. "The Decorum of Grief: Notes on the Representation of Mary at the Cross in Late Medieval Netherlandish Literature and Painting." 1995, pp. 67, 79, 85.

³⁴⁷ Powell [n. 344] at p. 544 – 545 suggests that the patrons of the painting, the crossbowmen's guild explains the Magdalene's bodily attitude as inflected by the shape of the crossbow, a theme picked up in the decoration of the tracery in the upper corners of the panel, and according to Powell also in the curvature of Christ's body.

³⁴⁸ Jolly, Penny Howell. Rogier van der Weyden's "Pregnant Magdalene: On the Rhetoric of Dress in the Descent from the Cross" *Studies in Iconography*, 2007, Vol. 28, p. 244.

pregnant on Calvary, redeemed by her conversion at the House of Simon from “wanton prostitute to Bride of Christ.”³⁴⁹ The conceit of the Magdalene’s “pregnancy” is powerful because of the transformation from her carnal past.³⁵⁰ Significantly, the Magdalene’s metaphorical pregnancy is more amenable to visual expression because she is not a dignified, modest virgin.

The circumscription of the Virgin’s representation due to her gender and modesty, the extent of her ability to express her spiritual childbirth labor is confined to the trope of collapse into the arms of attendants, a fully dressed pantomime of childbirth labor. The Virgin’s grace, dignity, her idealization, deny her “corporeal reality.”³⁵¹ Christ’s bodily abjection manifests an entirely different order of lived experience. The Virgin’s visual role in the *Descent* is to enact her minor role in the theology of redemption through the juxtaposition of her *compassio* with Christ’s *passio*. In Rogier’s *Descent*, as in countless images of *Christus Patiens*, Christ’s body appropriates the model of childbirth labor. Neff states: “If Christ on the cross is a mother in labor, then the swooning Virgin parallels and is mystically identified with him not only in his death but also in his maternity.”³⁵² Thus, even in an image where the intention is to visually represent the Virgin’s “second childbirth on Calvary” the Virgin is depicted miming the male body’s enactment of childbirth labor.

³⁴⁹ Jolly, [n. 348], pp. 209, 217, 232.

³⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p. 245.

³⁵¹ Caviness, Madeline H. *Visualizing Women in the Middle Ages: Sight, Spectacle, and Scopic Economy*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001, p. 8.

³⁵² Neff, [n. 1], p. 269.

The shift Neff charts from stoic Virgin to grief-stricken swoon demonstrates how the church calibrated the Virgin's iconography on Calvary in support of church authority, just as it had earlier adjusted her iconography in the Nativity. Harvey Hamburgh suggests that the trajectory Neff tracks was underpinned by the church's need to enlarge its role in salvation at a time of critical challenges to its authority.³⁵³ In the fifteenth century there were multiple challenges to Papal authority, the so-called Great Western schism beginning in 1378, with two rival pontiffs, caused divisions in church governance, eroded the legitimacy of the Papacy, and created widespread anxiety.³⁵⁴ The church mobilized a textual and visual imagery to expand the Virgin's role on Calvary and therefore in salvation and "[o]nce established, the ... doctrine of compassion found publication on many levels."³⁵⁵ There was a massive promotion of the iconography of *lo spasimo* in texts such as the *Meditationes Vitae Christi*, the *Mariale* of Bernadine of Busti, songs, the Feast of the Seven Sorrows of the Virgin, holidays, processions, devotional practices including Rosary devotion, Passion plays devoted to the Virgin's sorrow, and innumerable images of the swoon on Calvary. Images of the fainting Virgin "...[kept] the part played by Mary on Calvary constantly before the public."³⁵⁶ As Jolly observes: "Rogier's *Descent* was

³⁵³ Hamburgh, [n. 16], p. 53.

³⁵⁴ Rollo-Koster, Joelle. *Raiding Saint Peter: Empty Sees, Violence, and the Initiation of the Great Western Schism (1378)* Brill, 2008, pp. 170 – 175.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p. 54.

³⁵⁶ Hamburgh, [n. 16], pp. 55 – 58; Powell's article [n. 344] at p. 546 ff, details the many copies made using Rogier's *Descent from the Cross* as a model that disseminated the depiction of the Virgin's *lo spasimo* on Calvary throughout Europe.

perhaps the most copied work of fifteenth-century northern art...³⁵⁷ As the church came under increasing attack in the sixteenth century the Descent from the Cross became one of the church's most popular themes.³⁵⁸ At a "crucial time of challenge to authority, the association of the church with the Mother and thus their mutual role in salvation had to be asserted."³⁵⁹

5.2 The Stigmatization of St. Francis

The Virgin's limited ability to express her *compassio*, to express a physical identification with Christ's suffering on the cross, is brought into sharp focus by what I term the visual tradition of bodily verification. St. Francis's *compassio* was, to paraphrase Bonaventura, so tender that it transformed him into an image of the Crucified.³⁶⁰ By contrast the Virgin's so-called "mystical crucifixion" promoted in the writings of Bernardino of Siena and Denis the Carthusian was, like her childbirth labor, invisible.³⁶¹ As Marina Warner observes:

Francis's flair for the simple visual parable or gesture, and his order's determination to preach the Gospel among the lowest, hitherto cut off by ignorance of Latin and neglected by the clergy, inspired cult practices in a vernacular more universal than speech itself – the language of drama and image³⁶²

The language of drama and image available to depict St. Francis was unavailable to artists depicting the Virgin. The Franciscans exploited St. Francis' dramatic and abject image to

³⁵⁷ Jolly, [n. 348], pp. 229 – 232.

³⁵⁸ Hamburgh, [n. 16], p. 58.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p. 53.

³⁶⁰ Bonaventura, *Legenda Maior*, London: J.M. Dent and Co., 1904, p. 13.

³⁶¹ Von Simson, [n. 341], p. 14.

³⁶² Warner, [n. 8], p. 211.

cultivate his legend.³⁶³ Scholars observe an intimate connection between the Franciscans' focus on Christ's humanity, the use of images promoting "Christocentric piety," and the heralding of St. Francis as *Alter Christus*.³⁶⁴ Just as Christ's naked flesh emblazoned images marking the most significant events of his life – the Baptism, Flagellation, Crucifixion, Entombment, and Resurrection – St. Francis stripped to mark epochal events in his life. In Bonaventura's authorized biography of St. Francis, the *Legenda Maior*, St. Francis's removal of his clothes denotes the moment of his conversion to Christ: "...at once [St. Francis] did off all his garments...and stood up naked renouncing his earthly father and proclaiming his heavenly Father."³⁶⁵ Bonaventura combines St. Francis's nakedness and his public proclamation of his heavenly father to echo the Gospel accounts of Christ's naked baptism and God's public proclamation of Christ as his son.³⁶⁶ Throughout Bonaventura's life of St. Francis nakedness emblemizes St. Francis's *imitatio Christi*:

[St. Francis] was verily minded in all things to be made like unto Christ Crucified, who had hung on the Cross in poverty, and grief, and nakedness. Wherefore, as at the outset of his conversion [St. Francis] had stood naked before the Bishop, so in the ending of his life he was minded to quit the world naked.³⁶⁷

³⁶³ Davidson, Arnold I. and Fritz-Morkin, Maggie. "Miracles of Bodily Transformation or How St Francis Received the Stigmata. *Critical Inquiry*, 2009, Vol. 35 (3), pp. 451 – 480.

³⁶⁴ Derbes, [n. 12], pp. 18 – 20; Davidson and Fritz-Morkin, [n. 362], pp. 451 – 452; Camille, Michael. *Gothic Art Glorious Visions*, Upper Saddle River, NJ: Laurence King Publishing Limited, 1996, p. 108.

³⁶⁵ Bonaventura, [n. 360], p. 17.

³⁶⁶ Coogan, [n. 20], Matthew 3:16 – 17.

³⁶⁷ Bonaventura, [n. 360], p. 151.

The description and depiction of St. Francis's naked skin powerfully identified him with Christ: the imprint of the stigmata on his skin perfected St. Francis's identity as *Alter Christus*. Arnold Davidson and Maggie Fritz-Morkin argue that St Francis's stigmata marked a profound shift in thirteenth century spirituality: Francis's stigmatization inaugurated spirituality as physical phenomenon.³⁶⁸ Spirituality, no longer exclusively reliant on traditional art historical tropes of expensive colors, rich materials, gilt, and iconography, could now be visualized by the naked body marked by bloody wounds. Davidson and Fritz-Morkin chart a Franciscan textual and visual campaign designed "...to provide a representation of [the miracle of St. Francis's stigmatization]...that would actually persuade thirteenth and fourteenth century readers and viewers of its reality."³⁶⁹ The miracle of St. Francis's stigmatization on Mount Alvernia on September 24, 1224 generated sufficient controversy and skepticism that the church issued nine papal bulls, in the years following St. Francis's canonization, to assuage medieval doubt.³⁷⁰ Davidson and Fritz-Morkin convincingly demonstrate how images of St. Francis's stigmatization were tailored to visually reinforce Bonaventura's authoritative biography of St. Francis

³⁶⁸ Davidson and Fritz-Morkin, [n. 363]; However, see Muessig, Carolyn. "Signs of Salvation: The Evolution of Stigmatic Spirituality Before Francis of Assisi." *Church History*, 2013, Vol. 82 (1), p. 43, who argues for a lengthy history of stigmatic spirituality inaugurated by St Paul's statement in his letter to the Galatians: "For now on, let no one make trouble for me; for I carry the marks of Jesus branded on my body." See also the annotations in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* connecting St Paul's statement in Galatians about "the marks of Jesus branded on my body" to Paul's lengthy litany of physical abuse suffered during his ministry, Coogan, [n. 20], Corinthians 6:4 – 5 and 11: 23 – 25.

³⁶⁹ Davidson and Fritz-Morkin, [n.363], p.455.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p. 457.

commissioned by the Franciscans and completed in 1263.³⁷¹ Fresco cycles representing events in St. Francis's life, visual biographies, were deployed to dispel the "medieval world's unease with Francis's stigmata."³⁷² Although Bonaventura states that St. Francis was accompanied on his ascension of Mount Alvernia by two of his Franciscan brethren, Bonaventura is unequivocal that St. Francis was praying alone [although a falcon St. Francis befriended was present] on the mountainside when the stigmatization occurred.³⁷³ Despite frescoes and paintings depicting St. Francis's Franciscan brethren Leo sitting nearby on Mount Alvernia, the stigmatization was in the authoritative biography unwitnessed by human eyes.³⁷⁴

The canonical fresco cycle of St. Francis's life by the Master of San Francesco in the church of San Francesco in Assisi was an important model for Giotto's Santa Croce St. Francis cycle in the Bardi Chapel.³⁷⁵ Commissioned by the Bardi, a wealthy Florence banking family, Giotto probably executed the cycle between 1325 and 1328.³⁷⁶ Giotto's cycle condensed the twenty seven frescoes in San Francesco, Assisi to seven scenes representing a "rethinking and reformulating of Francis's life."³⁷⁷ Scholars agree that Giotto's Bardi Chapel frescoes are based

³⁷¹ Murray and Murray, [n. 28], p. 63.

³⁷² Chaterjee, Paroma. *Francis's Secret Stigmata. Art History*, 2012, Vol. 35 (1), p. 39.

³⁷³ Bonaventura, [n. 360], p. 137.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁵ Long, Jane C. "The Program of Giotto's Saint Francis Cycle at Santa Croce in Florence" *Franciscan Studies*, 1992, Vol. 52, p. 91.

³⁷⁶ Wolf, [n. 282], p. 78.

³⁷⁷ Long, [n. 375], p. 91.

upon Bonaventura's authorized biography³⁷⁸ *The Stigmatization* [Figure 35] chronologically the fifth fresco in the cycle, is separated from the other six frescoes in the cycle, by its location above the Bardi Chapel's entrance. As Jane C. Long observes *The Stigmatization's* isolated position, above the chapel's entrance signals its special role³⁷⁹ as "frontispiece and *summa*" to the cycle.³⁸⁰ The comparison between the Virgin's swoon on Calvary and *The Stigmatization of St. Francis* is instructive. Artists, restrained from explicitly making bodily parallels between the Virgin and Christ, had no such restraints in depicting the male body. St. Francis is the exemplar of the how the male body could make explicit bodily parallels with Christ's body.

Giotto's *The Stigmatization of St. Francis* is a masterwork of visual economy. As befits St. Francis's own insistence on austerity, Giotto relies on a spare, metonymic visual vocabulary. According to Bonaventura's biography, St. Francis received the stigmata while meditating on the nature of Christ with such an intensity of devotion that Christ's five wounds appeared on his own body.³⁸¹ In Giotto's interpretation of St. Bonaventura's *Legenda Maior*, St. Francis is interrupted in mid prayer by the vision of the seraph/Christ. St. Francis pivots his upper body and head to witness the hovering apparition while still in the act of prayer, his arms raised in the *orans* gesture. Giotto's *Stigmatization* arrests St. Francis in mid-movement, a "novel" "complex,

³⁷⁸ Neff, Amy. "Wicked Children on Calvary and the Baldness of St. Francis" *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*, 1990, Vol. 34 (3), p. 229; Hintz, Debra Louise. "The Legend of St. Francis in the Bardi Chapel and in the Sassetti Chapel." Dissertation, University of Arizona, 1983, p. 38; Long, [n. 295], pp. 90 – 91.

³⁷⁹ Long, [n. 375], pp. 105, 113.

³⁸⁰ Gardner, Julian. "The Louvre Stigmatization and the Problem of the Narrative Altarpiece." *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 1982, Vol. 45, (3), p. 234.

³⁸¹ Bonaventura, [n. 360], pp. 139 – 140.

twisting pose” to witness the apparition of the seraph/Christ: “[o]nly Giotto presents the figures in positions that cannot be maintained” heightening the tension.³⁸² As St. Francis turns toward the seraph/Christ rays of light connect Christ’s wounds with St. Francis’s body marking St. Francis with the stigmata.

In Giotto’s fresco, identification of St. Francis with Christ is immediate and legible. Giotto depicts St. Francis’s body bearing witness to the miracle both in his gestural language and in the physical marks the stigmata inscribed on his body. Giotto’s depiction of St. Francis’s complex somatic responses to the seraph/Christ, his pivot toward it as he becomes aware of the hovering apparition and the direction of Francis’s upturned gaze make palpable the miraculous presence of the apparition. Further, the imprint of Christ’s wounds on Francis’s body, is physical evidence of the miracle. St. Francis’s bodily attitude, gestures, gaze, and the wounds that appear on his flesh respond to the miracle. Unlike the post-Birgittine Virgin who is physically disassociated from the water, blood, and effort of her childbirth labor; Francis’ flesh is physically transformed. The power of physical phenomena as evidence of spirituality at stake in Bonaventura’s text and Giotto’s image is unavailable to the Virgin.

Even Giotto’s landscape in *The Stigmatization* is transformed by the miracle. On St. Francis’s left, Mount Alvernia’s slope rises sharply upward and behind St. Francis’s head where a protruding stone ledge underlines the fissured mouth of a cave. Giotto’s cave opening, at an oblique angle to the picture plane, is in a triangle shaped shadow behind St. Francis’s haloed head. To St. Francis’s right a small chapel, placed at an opposing oblique angle to the picture

³⁸² Long, [n. 375], pp. 115 – 116.

plane, has an opening door, also an entrance into an enclosed space. The chapel's roof forms a triangle paralleling the shadowed triangle containing the cave behind St. Francis's head. The opposing oblique angles, the darkened open entrances, and the triangular shapes stage a visual dialogue between cave and chapel. The cave and the chapel mark the divisions in St. Francis's life, a division emphasized in Bonaventura's *Legenda Maior*. Bonaventura recounts how St. Francis's time was divided between his solitary moments in "divine converse" with God in lonely, silent places and his worldly life founding and leading the Franciscan order.³⁸³ Francis spent one part of his time "...laboring for the profit of his neighbors, the other he would devote unto the peaceful ecstasies of contemplation."³⁸⁴ The cave is a recurring motif in St. Francis's first biographer, Thomas de Celano's *Vita Beati Francisci*, written between 1228 and 1229, and also in Bonaventura's authorized biography.³⁸⁵ For St. Francis, sites such as caves, pits, and grottoes, provided a retreat from his disapproving father, the site of his confession of faith, a respite from worldly concerns, and a refuge for St. Francis and his early followers.³⁸⁶ The thirteenth century hymn *Sanctitatis nova signa* refers to St. Francis living in a cave-cell on Mount Alvernia.³⁸⁷ The *Fioretti* or *Little Flowers*, a popular collection of legends about St.

³⁸³ Bonaventura, [n. 360], p. 18.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p. 13.

³⁸⁵ Janson, Anthony F. "The Meaning of Landscape in Bellini's St. Francis in Ecstasy" *Artibus et Historiae*, 1994, Vol. 15 (30), p. 50. There is a long tradition of caves as sites of religious meditation in Christianity.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid*, p. 51; Bonaventura, [n. 356], pp. 15 – 16.

³⁸⁷ Cook, William R. "Giotto and the Figure of St. Francis" In *Cambridge Companion to Giotto*, Derbes, Anne and Sandona, Mark [Eds.] Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 154;

Francis, refers to the devil tempting St. Francis in a hollow in the rock on Mount Alvernia shortly before the stigmatization making correspondences to the Gospel accounts of Christ's temptation in the wilderness before the Passion.³⁸⁸ *The Stigmatization's* cave further develops St. Francis's identification as *alter Christus* linking the site of St. Francis's stigmatization with Christ's humble birthplace based upon the Apocryphal *Book of James* account of Christ's birth in a cave. As discussed above in connection with the *Nativity in a Cave*, the cave is a flexible sign evoking a rich pagan symbolism of fecundity, origins, and the cosmos as well as a site favored for Christian religious meditation. According to medieval historian William R. Cook, Giotto's citation of a cave in *The Stigmatization* and other early images of the Stigmatization, especially those originating from Siena, reference a "tradition of understanding Francis as [the prophet] Elijah" who similarly encountered God outside a cave while on a mountain.³⁸⁹ Simon Schama suggests that the cave's fissures in depictions of the stigmatization on Mount Alvernia are linked to the Gospel account of Christ's Passion on Calvary when "[t]he earth shook, and the rocks were split" constructing Mount Alvernia as a second Calvary.³⁹⁰ Giotto's mountainside cavern also develops the theme of St. Francis's famous ability to commune with nature: as Francis's body is marked by the stigmata the rocks too are riven with fissures. Giotto's falcon perched near

Kiely, Robert, "Further Considerations of the Holy Stigmata of St. Francis: Where was Brother Leo? *Religion and the Arts*, 1999, Vol 3(1), p. 31.

³⁸⁸ Smart, Alastair. *The Assisi Problem and the Art of Giotto*. Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1971, p. 204; Coogan, [n. 20], Matthew 4:1 – 11, Mark 1.12 – 13, and Luke 4:1 – 13.

³⁸⁹ Cook, [n. 387], p. 153.

³⁹⁰ Schama, Simon. *Landscape and Memory*. Toronto: Vintage Canada Edition, 1996, p. 436. Coogan, [n. 1], Matthew 27:52.

Mount Alvernia's apex further invokes the theme of St. Francis's communion with animals and birds and his ability to interpret God's will through the actions of creatures. On a previous visit to Mount Alvernia St. Francis perceived the rejoicing of the birds and his special bond of friendship with a falcon that nested there as a "divine omen...inasmuch as that praiser and worshipper of God...was at that very place and time to be exalted by the vision of the Seraph."³⁹¹ St. Francis's cave also resonates as a symbol of salvation – the site of Christ's entombment prior to his resurrection. Further, Giotto's inclusion of a cave in his depiction of the stigmatization underwrites the miracle's authenticity by locating the event in a specific locale. In St. Francis's time, Mount Alvernia was known to be riddled with caves and to this day it "abounds with caves."³⁹² Giotto's naturalism, his muted color scheme, his spare visual vocabulary, and his tight close-up of the miraculous event operate to authenticate St. Francis's stigmatization. Unlike the Virgin whose miraculous birth of Christ is never shown, St. Francis' body is miraculously inscribed by his perfect devotion to Christ.

The small chapel on St. Francis's right speaks to St. Francis's ministry. The place St. Francis "loved before all other places in the world..." was a small chapel dedicated to the Virgin.³⁹³ Bonaventura describes this chapel in the vocabulary of fertility, conception, and parturition marking out the chapel as an embodiment of the Virgin. Bonaventura emphasizes Francis's love for the Virgin and the chapel's significance as a site of divine revelation.³⁹⁴ When he was not

³⁹¹ Bonaventura, [n. 360], p. 9.

³⁹² Janson, [n. 385], p. 52.

³⁹³ Bonaventura, [n. 360], p. 21.

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

taking refuge in a cave, St. Francis abided in the chapel, in the chapel St. Francis “conceive[d] and g[a]ve birth unto the spirit of Gospel truth, and had a vision of the Rule for the Order.”³⁹⁵

Giotto brilliantly condenses Bonaventura’s description of the tension in St. Francis’s life between the eremitic and evangelistic life – the hermit’s renunciation of the world to contemplate Christ and the worldly activity involved in St. Francis’s ministry – into the motif of the cave and chapel. Giotto’s suggestive use of color, his striking deployment of triangular forms, the contrast between the ground’s solidity and the seraph/Christ’s atmospheric disturbance, divide the fresco in two. The diagonal contour of Mount Alvernia’s slope splits the fresco between ivory colored Mount Alvernia and the cloudy gray mist surrounding and linking the seraph/Christ and the chapel. Countervailing diagonal vectors are produced by the fresco’s central drama, the rays connecting the seraph/Christ and St. Francis wound to wound. Giotto resolves the tension created through his geometrical forms and countervailing vectors in St. Francis’s complex upward movement of simultaneously rising, pivoting, praying, and receiving the stigmata. *The Stigmatization* foregrounds St. Francis’s body. Known for his “short, slender, and sickly” appearance, “weak shoulders”, emaciated frame, care worn appearance and nearly blind eyes, St. Francis is transformed from “the little poor one of Christ” into a youthful, handsome, Christian hero.³⁹⁶ Although no other human witnessed St. Francis’s stigmatization on Mount Alvernia, its slopes, the falcon poised on the mountain, the trees, the fissured cave, and the chapel door that appears to swing open, bear witness to the unfolding drama. Francis’s own body articulates its

³⁹⁵ Bonaventura, [n. 360], p. 23.

³⁹⁶ Giorgi [n. 61], p. 130; Bonaventura, [n. 360], pp. 82, 85, 148, 150, 151.

role as witness. Even the positioning of the fresco in the cycle conveys Giotto's witnessing theme: sited above the entrance to the Bardi Chapel, *The Stigmatization* constructs each viewer entering the chapel as an eyewitness.³⁹⁷ Operating as a frontispiece, *The Stigmatization* indexes the Bardi chapel's fresco cycle. *The Stigmatization's* prominent placement disseminates the idea of St. Francis as *Alter Christus* beyond the Bardi Chapel to all of the viewers in the transept.³⁹⁸ In images commissioned by the Franciscans, adept at translating difficult concepts into visual legibility, their founder's *compassio* transforms him into a second Christ, *Alter Christus*. St. Francis's perfect devotion is inscribed on his body: his body speaks. St. Francis's stigmata participate in a textual and visual tradition the church developed to counter anxieties and skepticism surrounding miraculous events. The visual verification tradition goes back at least as far as the Gospels.

5.3 Doubting Thomas' Probing Finger

In the fourth Gospel St. Thomas, absent at the first appearance of Christ to the Apostles after the resurrection, disbelieved the Apostles' eyewitness account and stated, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe." [John, 20:24] When the resurrected Christ appeared again eight days later when Thomas was present, Christ states: "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe."³⁹⁹ The author of the Gospel of John uses

³⁹⁷ Wolf, [n. 282], p. 86.

³⁹⁸ I thank Dr. Carol Knicely for drawing to my attention this aspect of the placement of Giotto's *The Stigmatization*.

³⁹⁹ Coogan [n. 20], John 20:25 – 27.

Thomas' doubt to teach a lesson on the nature of faith: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."⁴⁰⁰ The potent drama of Thomas' doubt afforded artists an opportunity to thematize vision, touch, physical phenomena as evidence, and the nature of faith. Duccio's *Incredulity of St Thomas*, 1308, [Figure 36] has an extraordinary clarity of form. Christ's gesture of raising one arm participates in what Glenn W. Most, refers to as a "pathos formula," a gesture popular in antique Greek and Roman statuary that combines "eroticism and suffering."⁴⁰¹ Lifting his right arm, pulling up his tunic with his left hand, Christ exposes his side wound to Thomas's probing finger. At the painting's center Thomas crooks his index finger penetrating Christ's bleeding side wound. The wounds in Christ's hands and feet are clearly visible. Christ's exposed wound, outlined by its bloody edge and bleeding lower lip is multiply framed – surrounded by a black cloak overpainted with gold decoration in the Byzantine style, a rose-colored tunic, contrasted against his white flesh, framed by the arch of a recessed niche, and below a luminous white pediment. The apostles clad in soft tones of scarlet, green, olive, violet, rose, brown, and blue blend into each other indistinguishably. Nothing distracts from the painting's subject. Flanking Christ on either side, the Apostles fasten concentrated gazes on Thomas as his finger pulls at the wound's lower lip, opening the wound, making it bleed, and inserting his index finger. The Apostles' bodily gestures – the direction of their feet, their outstretched hands, the cant of their bodies, the tilt of their heads, are choreographed to direct the eye to the central drama of St. Thomas's finger as it pulls down on the wound's lip to penetrate it. None of the

⁴⁰⁰ Coogan, [n. 20], John 20:29.

⁴⁰¹ Most, Glenn W. *Doubting Thomas*. London and Cambridge: Harvard University. Press, 2005, p. 177.

Apostles speak; the painting is absolutely silent. Every element of the painting operates to direct the viewer's attention to Thomas's probing finger verifying the physical existence of the side wound inflicted during the Passion on Christ's resurrected body. In his thorough analysis of the language, structure, context, and meaning of the Gospel of John's encounter between Thomas and Christ, Glenn Most convincingly demonstrates that in the Gospel of John it is at best ambiguous whether Thomas touches Christ.⁴⁰² Most observes: "the one thing most people think they know about Doubting Thomas is false."⁴⁰³ Most's close reading of the Gospel shows that there is no confirmation that Thomas actually touched Christ. For Most, it is a "canonical misinterpretation," "authoritative error", the apocryphal Gospels and, most importantly, pictorial tradition that have nourished the notion that Thomas physically examined Christ's side wound with his fingers.⁴⁰⁴ Although Thomas demands to examine Christ's wounds in the Gospel of John and Christ tells him "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe" [John 26:27], the Gospel of John is silent on whether Thomas actually physically touched Christ's wounds.

The Gospel's solution to authenticating Christ's crucifixion and his resurrection to overcome Thomas's doubt is to present Christ's wounds for Thomas to see. It is the pictorial tradition of expressing Thomas' doubt that his finger probes Christ's wound as evidence that the crucifixion and resurrection occurred. St. Bonaventura's biography of St. Francis develops its own complex rhetoric of verification – textual, visual, tactile, consequential, and quasi-legal – to counter

⁴⁰² Most, [n. 401], p. 69.

⁴⁰³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

doubts about the miracle of the stigmatization. Beginning with a vivid description of the stigmatization echoing and reinforcing Thomas de Celano's account in his *Vita*, Bonaventura accumulates layers of verification. At the end of each of his chapters, Bonaventura rehearses St. Francis's past miracles like a chorus summarizing the action in a play, reinforcing the narrative. Following a detailed description of the appearance of the stigmatization Bonaventura recounts the first eye witnessing of the stigmata by St. Francis's inner circle, the Brethren and Clare; next is the tactile verification of the stigmata by devout kissing and touching.⁴⁰⁵ However, St. Francis's side wound, the wound most closely aligned with Christ's Passion on Calvary, is shrouded from view. Bonaventura adds tension by hiding Francis' side wound: "...the wound in his side [Francis] so heedfully concealed as that during his lifetime none might behold it, save by stealth."⁴⁰⁶ By stealth one of the Brethren touches the unseen side wound through St. Francis's under linens causing St. Francis excruciating pain.⁴⁰⁷ The concealment of Francis's wound enhanced its aura of mystery. Bonaventura describes Francis's side wound as "a rose most fair" associating it with Christ's side wound, often depicted as a five petalled rose, strengthening Francis's identity as *alter Christus*.⁴⁰⁸ Until St. Francis's death the side wound's existence in Bonaventura's biography is a matter of inference drawn from the bloodstains on St. Francis's

⁴⁰⁵ Bonaventura, [n. 360], p. 144.

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁸ Easton notes the rose served as a vaginal replacement in medieval literature, Christ's wound was compared to a rose and Christ was referred to as "*rosa mundi*" Easton, [n. 13], p. 405; Bonaventura, [n. 360], p. 156.

under linens.⁴⁰⁹ Giotto's *The Stigmatization* eliminates the secrecy surrounding St. Francis's side wound by showing an opening in St. Francis's habit where the ray of light connects the seraph/Christ's side wound and St. Francis's corresponding wound. However, in the Giotto cycle, as in the Bonaventura biography, it is only with St. Francis's death that his side wound is available for both visual and tactile verification.⁴¹⁰

5.4 Doubting Jerome's Digital Penetration of St. Francis' Side Wound

The visual strategies in Giotto's fresco the *Lamentation and Funeral Rites of St. Francis*, inside the Santa Croce's Bardi Chapel [Figure 37] remain clear and innovative despite its considerable loss of paint and faded colors. Unlike Duccio's *Incredulity of St Thomas*, Giotto engages the viewer's participation in verifying St Francis's side wound. Giotto reinforces St Francis's identity as *Alter Christus* by quoting his own earlier pictorial composition in the *Lamentation of Christ* in the Arena Chapel. Lying supine on an austere bed St. Francis's body is surrounded by his devoted followers. St Francis's youthful profile, the positioning of the clusters of mourners around his body, and the tender cradling of his feet and hands quotes the dead Christ's physical appearance, the *Lamentation of Christ's* pictorial composition, and the bodily attitudes of Christ's mourners. The viewer, beginning with the two friars caressing St. Francis's feet, follows the mourners around St. Francis's body, to the group of friars facing the viewer gazing at St. Francis, and to the three friars standing at his side. A kneeling friar bows his head to kiss St. Francis's hand and its unseen stigmata while another friar kneels by St. Francis' head praying. A friar standing by St. Francis's head gazes heavenward in the direction of a *tondo* above the Bardi

⁴⁰⁹ Bonaventura, [n. 360], p. 145.

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 157.

chapel's *Lamentation* depicting an image of St. Francis transported to heaven by angels. It is then that the viewer is struck by the one figure not in clerical dress, a figure wearing a mantle the color of dried blood kneeling at the saint's side. All four of this figure's fingers are plunged so deeply into St. Francis's side wound they almost disappear. This is Bonaventura's knight St. Jerome, St. Francis' own doubting Thomas:

Jerome...having had doubts concerning these sacred tokens, and having been an unbeliever like Thomas..." moves the nails in St. Francis's hands and feet and touches the side wound.⁴¹¹

Unlike the Gospel of John's author, Bonaventura specifically states that Jerome actually makes physical contact with St. Francis's wounds, implying that Thomas also actually touched Christ's wounds. Instead of following Bonaventura's account and having the knight Jerome touch St. Francis's side wound, Giotto depicts Jerome's four fingers violating St. Francis's wound. Giotto's transformation of the old, frail St. Francis into a beautiful Christ-like youth enhances St. Francis's role as *Alter Christus* but also adds a sexual frisson to Jerome's digital penetration of St. Francis's vaginal side wound. Giotto's exaggerated penetration of St. Francis's side wound touch is disturbingly mnemonic.

In Bonaventura's biography doubting Jerome's visual and tactile verification transform him into a "constant witness."⁴¹² Having first established Jerome as a credible, upstanding witness Bonaventura has Jerome swear an oath on a "thrice-holy" object thereby elevating Bonaventura's

⁴¹¹ Bonaventura, [n. 360], p. 157.

⁴¹² *Ibid.*

second hand textual account of Jerome as eyewitness to the status of a legal oath.⁴¹³ Davidson and Fritz-Morkin note that “Bonaventura ...transposes the concern with witnesses from criminal law to the authentication of miracles.”⁴¹⁴ The uncanny, disturbing, sexually haptic encounter, the doubter’s finger[s] plunged into a bloody wound, verify the existence of a miraculous event in Duccio’s *Incredulity of Saint Thomas* and Giotto’s *Lamentation and Funeral Rites of St. Francis*. The visual verification tradition of Thomas and Jerome, where a male’s fingers penetrate a bloody side wound that has been repeatedly equated with the vagina in images of the isolated side wound surrounded by a group of watching men, constructs the bodies of Christ and St. Francis as both male and female, as a locus of hetero-and homo-erotic desire and penetration. Underlying the viewer’s unease with witnessing the disquietingly sexual gesture of digital penetration, is the construction of the viewer as another witness whose exploring and exploitive gaze inflicts a further violation on an unprotected, sexualized, body. In the visual verification tradition, the viewer is situated not only as a witness but as a voyeur.

5.5 Doubting Salome’s Amputated Hands

Two of the Apocryphal Infancy Gospels, the *Book of James* and *The Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*, and *The Golden Legend* contain variations on the story of doubting Salome; the *Book of James* contains the most complete account.⁴¹⁵ As the Virgin goes into labor on the journey to Bethlehem, Joseph finds a cave to shelter her and sets out in search of a midwife to assist with

⁴¹³ Bonaventura, [n. 360], p. 157.

⁴¹⁴ Davidson and Fritz-Morkin [n. 363], p. 471.

⁴¹⁵ James, [n. 21], *Book of James*, pp. 46 – 47, *Gospel of Pseudo Matthew*, p. 74; De Voragine [n. 161], p. 48.

the birth. Joseph finds the midwives Zebel and Salome to attend at Christ's birth and brings them to the cave. Zebel believes in the miracle of a virgin giving birth: "A virgin hath brought forth, which her nature alloweth her not" but Salome expresses her skepticism: "As the Lord God liveth, if I make not trial and prove her nature I will not believe that a virgin hath brought forth."⁴¹⁶ Salome, a pragmatist, acting on her incredulity attempts to physically examine the post-partum Virgin's vagina to determine whether her hymen is intact. Unlike Thomas and Jerome who, at least in the pictorial tradition, overcome their doubt by viewing and touching the marks of the Passion and the stigmatization on Christ's and Francis's bodies, Salome is immediately punished for her attempt:

And Salome made trial and cried out and said: Woe unto mine iniquity and mine unbelief, because I have tempted the living God, and lo, my hand falleth away from me in fire"⁴¹⁷

Salome's burned hand incites her belief in God's power and she is healed by praying to God and by following God's instructions: "bring thine hand near unto the young child and take him up, and there shall be unto thee salvation and joy"⁴¹⁸ The ability to witness and verify the miracle of Mary's virgin birth is prevented by gender. Salome is an example of a female who transgresses her proper role and suffers the consequences. The canonical gospels eliminate any reference to midwives and exclude the concept of Salome witnessing and attempting to verify the miracle of the virginal birth. In the canonical Gospels Mary's virgin birth of Christ is presented as a

⁴¹⁶ James, [n. 21], pp. 46 – 47.

⁴¹⁷ James, [n. 21], p. 47. In the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew* [n. 2], p. 74 and De Voragine [n. 161], p. 48, Salome's hand is "withered" rather than burned.

⁴¹⁸ James, [n. 21], p. 47.

fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy.⁴¹⁹ In Salome's story, unlike Thomas's and Jerome's, the Virgin's body does not articulate knowledge to sight nor to touch. Further, the text directs the story away from the Virgin: her body is not in service to her agency, rather, it is a vehicle for instilling faith in God and in the infant Christ. Fingers were allowed to penetrate Christ's and St. Francis's vagina-like side wounds as evidence of the existence and the authenticity of the miracles associated with them. The Virgin's vagina had no textual nor visual existence and was inaccessible to sight or touch. Although the Nativity is only a miracle if Mary is a virgin, her post-partum virginity is concealed. Anxieties surrounding the proof of the Virgin's pre-and-post-partum virginity are manifest in the *Golden Legend's* account of the Nativity:

In the first place, it was a miracle that the Mother of Christ was a virgin, after the birth of her Son as well as before. We have five witnesses to prove that she was a virgin. The first is the prophet Isaias, who in his seventh Chapter says: 'Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a Son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel.' The second is the example of Aaron's rod, which blossomed without the help of man. The third is Joseph's attention for he watched over her and she remained pure.⁴²⁰

The Golden Legend's fourth proof of Mary's virginity is the midwife Zebel's belief and the withering and healing of the doubter Salome's hand.⁴²¹ The fifth proof involves the destruction of a statue that an oracle prophesied would collapse on the day a virgin gave birth to a child.⁴²² Prophecy, metaphor, anecdote, punishment, and an oracle are not equivalent to the visual and haptic verification tradition available to the male bodies of Christ and St. Francis. Glenn R. Most

⁴¹⁹ Coogan, [n. 20], Matthew 1:23.

⁴²⁰ De Voragine, [n. 161], p. 48.

⁴²¹ *Ibid.*

⁴²² *Ibid.*

cites a translation of the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew that contains a variant of the apocryphal versions of the doubting Salome stories considered above.⁴²³ In the version cited by Most the midwife Zebel or Zelomi who believes in the Virgin birth examines the Virgin confirming the miraculous nature of the birth.⁴²⁴ Notably, this variant has never, to my knowledge, been translated into visual representation whereas Christ and Thomas's encounter in the Gospel of John where there is no textual evidence of actual touching was the basis for a popular subject of Christian art, the *Doubting Thomas*. For Most, Thomas' probing of Christ's post-resurrection side wound registers the profound anxiety surrounding the issues raised by what exact physical form the resurrected body would take, i.e. would it bear the wounds, aging, and deterioration experienced by the body up until the time of one's death.⁴²⁵

The anxiety surrounding the visual representation of even a thwarted physical examination of the Virgin's vagina meant that Salome's story is seldom the subject of painting.⁴²⁶ It is useful to recall here the explanation P.J. Nordhagen provides for the scarcity of depictions of Salome's aborted physical inspection of the Virgin Mary's vagina. Following earlier authors Nordhagen suggests that Salome's inspection of the Virgin's vagina was too crude a subject for visual

⁴²³ Most, [n. 401], p. 115.

⁴²⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 113 – 114.

⁴²⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 126 – 127.

⁴²⁶ The exception is the presence of the midwives Zebel and Salome in depictions of the Nativity in a Cave such as those analyzed above where in a related but separate scene from the recumbent Virgin the midwives extract the neonate Christ from the font/womb in a scene that is referred to in texts as the Midwives Bathing the Infant Christ. See Figs. 1 – 5.

representation.⁴²⁷ Depictions of Doubting Thomas and doubting Jerome probing Christ's and St. Francis's vaginal side wounds rely upon the sexuality and violence of the gesture for their mnemonic value. To paraphrase Mary Carruthers, to be memorative, an image should be emotionally charged, extreme, violent, vivid, bloody, and/or sexual.⁴²⁸

Compare the expressive potential of the visual verification tradition in Duccio's and Giotto's paintings just examined with an illumination of the Salome story attributed to a follower of Jean Pichore from a French fifteenth century Book of Hours [Figure 38].⁴²⁹ Instead of the verification of a miraculous event the subject of this illumination is focused on the punishment, which is quite bloody. Salome is punished for her presumption in daring to attempt to physically examine the Virgin. In the apocryphal gospel Salome's hand is burned, in the *Golden Legend* her hand is withered, and in this image the illuminator intensifies the drama by chopping off both of Salome's offending hands. Salome's amputated bloody stumps direct the eye toward the Virgin's hands crossed over her chest in a protective, prayer-like gesture. The Virgin's hands, oddly large and misshapen, her fingers strangely positioned – the middle three fingers clumped together with a gap between the fifth finger and the thumb – appear to flutter. The red-headed Virgin, her heavily lidded eyes cast down, her gaze unfocused, lips parted, mouth open, appears dazed. Joseph, standing close behind her, appears to peer up from under bushy, white eyebrows at the

⁴²⁷ Nordhagen, [n. 44] p. 326, FN 7.

⁴²⁸ Carruthers, [n. 179], pp. 166 – 167.

⁴²⁹ I am grateful to my thesis supervisor Dr. Joseph Monteyne for alerting me to this remarkable illumination.

hovering red-haired angel clasping Salome's amputated, bleeding hands, like a second set of wings.

The illuminator displaces the Virgin's birthing fluids onto Salome's bleeding stumps. In the apocryphal gospel, Salome's punishment incites her belief in God's power and her hands are healed by praying and through contact with the infant Christ.⁴³⁰ Here Salome's hands are about to be returned to her by the descending angel, are held aloft and clasped by their bloody wrists. The hands held by the angel, Salome's severed stumps, and the Virgin's misshapen hands construct a triangle of indecipherable gestures at the illumination's center. At stake in images of the apocryphal *Nativity* incorporating Salome's story is the collision between the pictorial expression of the Virgin Mary's post-partum virginity and the fifteenth century's gendered prohibitions of her representation. Doubting Salome also narrates the penalty for female presumption, incredulity, or curiosity. The act of verification by sight and touch is not available to the female eye or finger. Even if Salome had hands and could conduct a physical examination, she would be prevented – the Virgin's body is completely encased in a voluminous tunic and impregnable mantle. The anxiety generated by the very concept of the Virgin's female body is telegraphed in her garments. Salome's doubt – like the Virgin's second childbirth labor on Calvary – resists visualization.

Whereas Christ's body is transformed by experience and Francis's body becomes an *archeipoiotos* "a body that God's hand had ...written upon," the Virgin's experience of the Incarnation, pregnancy, and childbirth finds no somatic visual register on either her body or her

⁴³⁰ James, [n. 21], pp. 46 – 47.

face.⁴³¹ Christ's body, bearing the marks of the Passion, authenticates his narrative. St. Francis's body too bears the marks articulating his special relationship with Christ. Christ and St. Francis's existence and their miracles are doubly verified by the probing fingers of doubting Thomas and doubting Jerome. Representations of the marks inscribed on the naked male body evidence the male body's lived experience. Just as Giotto quoted his own composition of the mourners in his painting of Christ's *Lamentation* reinforcing St. Francis's identification as *Alter Christus* in his *Funeral and Lamentation of St. Francis* [Figure 37], painting's legibility, scale, memorative capacity, and prestige combined with the church's exegesis, underwrote the authenticity of Christianity's pictorial narratives. The range of expressive modalities available to artists representing the Virgin was circumscribed by her gender, the dignity due her status, and her modesty. The Virgin's covered body is usually depicted as passive or reactive. As Madeline Caviness observes, "idealization denies women's corporeal reality."⁴³² In Western Christian art, as Margaret R. Miles notes: the unambiguously good woman is a clothed woman...⁴³³ The church's terror of the sexual, generative female body, its insistence on the Virgin's fictive virginity, robbed the Virgin's body of its power to speak.

5.6 *Ostentatio Genitalium* – The Showing Forth of the Infant Christ's Genitalia

Returning to the illumination of *Salome with Severed Hands* [Figure 38], an additional and significant feature of its iconography was shaped by St. Birgitta's vision of the Nativity. In her *Revelations* St. Birgitta describes the Virgin exposing the infant Christ's genitalia to the

⁴³¹ Chaterjee, [n. 372], refers to Francis's body as an *archeiropoietos*, p. 40.

⁴³² Caviness, [n. 351], p. 8.

⁴³³ Miles, [n. 10], p. 144.

shepherds when they attended after his birth to express their adoration. Startlingly, in *Salome with Severed Hands* one of Salome's amputated bloody stumps is positioned on a vertical axis with the naked, infant Christ's delicately delineated penis. It was Leo Steinberg who first identified art history's failure to acknowledge that late medieval and Renaissance images frequently foreground Christ's penis.⁴³⁴ Steinberg's assemblage of these previously ignored late medieval and Renaissance images of *ostentatio genitalium*, Christ's display of his penis, marked the outing of another of art history's exclusions, gaps, and embarrassed silences.⁴³⁵ In the Byzantine Nativities examined earlier [Figures 1 – 5], the neonate Christ, completely swaddled, was lying in a manger; in scenes of the midwives bathing Christ his body is positioned so that his penis is indiscernible, and in Byzantine depictions of the Madonna and Child the infant Christ is robed. During the high Middle Ages Steinberg refers to the “deep obfuscation of medieval figuring of Christ that neutered him;” that is, the place where Christ's penis should have been delineated is either blank or imperceptible.⁴³⁶ By the late Medieval period in the Latin West, but not in the Byzantine East, in some depictions of the *Madonna and Child*, *Nativities*, and *Adorations of the Child*, the infant Christ's penis became highly visible.⁴³⁷ In the images assembled by Steinberg he likens the focus on the infant Christ's penis, *ostentatio genitalium*, the showing forth of the penis, to *ostentatio vulernum*, the showing forth of the wounds.⁴³⁸ One of

⁴³⁴ Steinberg, [n. 84], p. 645.

⁴³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 11.

⁴³⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 477 – 478.

⁴³⁷ *Ibid*, p. 32.

⁴³⁸ *Ibid*, p. 11.

Steinberg's important claim is that images of *ostentio genitalium*, have no textual precedent and therefore the pictures themselves are "primary texts."⁴³⁹ Vida Hull suggests that St. Birgitta's description of Christ's gender in her vision of the Nativity is the textual precedent for the proliferation of late medieval and Renaissance images of the Virgin exposing Christ's penis to the gaze of the shepherds and others.⁴⁴⁰ In the Gospel account of the Nativity, the angels announcing Christ's birth, referring to Christ as Savior, Messiah, and Lord, tell the shepherds to go to Bethlehem where the "...child will be wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger" [Luke 2:10-16]. St. Birgitta's vision of the Nativity alters the Gospel's account of the Christ child being "wrapped in bands of cloth" and adds significant new details:

In the same place, I also saw how, while the Virgin Mary and Joseph were adoring the babe in the manger, the shepherds and those tending their flocks came to see and adore the infant. When the shepherds saw him, they asked first whether it was a boy or a girl, because the angels had announced to them that the "savior" and not the "savioress" of the world had been born. So his Virgin Mother showed them the infant's male genitals. At once, with great reverence and joy, they adored him. Then they returned, praising and glorifying God for all that they had heard and seen.⁴⁴¹

The shepherds' first concern, according to St. Birgitta's vision, is the infant Christ's gender. In Birgitta's vision the Virgin exposes her child's genitalia to the shepherds' gaze verifying that he is a male child. As discussed in Chapter 2, St. Birgitta's vision changed the iconography of the Nativity in the Latin West replacing the swaddled infant with a naked infant radiating light. As

⁴³⁹ Steinberg, [n. 84], p. 51.

⁴⁴⁰ Hull, [n. 63], p. 78.

⁴⁴¹ Searby, [n. 65], p. 253.

Steinberg notes, by 1400 the neonate Christ is usually depicted naked.⁴⁴² Although it was the shepherds who, according to St. Birgitta, visually inspected Christ's genitalia, Renaissance painting subjected Christ's genitalia to the gaze not only of the shepherds, but also of the Magi, the Holy Family, various saints, donors, and to the viewer.⁴⁴³ For Steinberg, depictions of the infant Christ's penis carry theological meaning as physical proof of the Incarnation, the humanation of God.⁴⁴⁴ Paintings of the infant Christ self-presenting his penis by drawing aside his draperies with one hand while making the sign of the blessing with his other hand constitute, for Steinberg, an act of verification of God's humanation coupled with a blessing, a "dramatization of doubt."⁴⁴⁵ The doubt Steinberg identifies is that held by heretics such as the Cathars who "without proof of blood" might have thought "the flesh assumed by the godhead" was "merely simulated, phantom, deceptive."⁴⁴⁶ Yet, in the numerous paintings Steinberg assembles to demonstrate the infant Christ's *ostentatio genitalium*, there is no depiction of blood nor of circumcision. If blood was verification of Christ's humanation, the innumerable depictions of *ostentatio vulernum* – of Christ figured as *Christus Patiens*, would satisfy that requirement and depictions of *ostentatio genitalium* would be unnecessary. The doubt very clearly articulated and investigated by the shepherds according to St. Birgitta's *Revelations* did not concern Christ's

⁴⁴² Steinberg, [n. 84], p. 57.

⁴⁴³ For an assemblage of figures of the Christ's genitalia exposed to shepherds, Magi et al see Hull, [n. 63], Figs. 1 – 23.

⁴⁴⁴ For a detailed discussion of Steinberg's theological explanations for the display of Christ's penis in late medieval and Renaissance art see Steinberg, [n. 84], pp. 42 – 50.

⁴⁴⁵ Steinberg, [n. 84], p. 644.

⁴⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p. 121.

humanity but his gender.⁴⁴⁷ Arguing that Christ's nakedness is evidence of his humanation Steinberg states: "...[n]akedness becomes the badge of the human condition which the Incarnation espoused."⁴⁴⁸ Yet what the infant Christ displays as evidence in the paintings Steinberg relies upon is not nakedness as a badge of the human condition but the penis as a badge of the male condition. In the long running debate between Carolyn Walker Bynum and Leo Steinberg, Bynum argued that medieval people blurred the boundaries between male and female genders and considered Christ's feminized naked body as generative.⁴⁴⁹ Steinberg's position is that Christ's humanation required the depiction of visual proof of Christ's male gender and sexuality.⁴⁵⁰ I argue that the feminization of Christ's body, the appropriation of the female indicia of childbirth in the figuring of the suffering Christ, created confusion and anxiety about Christ's gender. In my view, the visual convention of *ostentation genitalium* responds to that anxiety. The desire for visual evidence of Christ's gender appears to have found its first textual expression in St. Birgitta's account of her revelation about the shepherds' adoration of the infant Christ. Anxiety about the male role in human reproduction, as earlier discussed, found visual expression in multiple subjects for pictorial representation: the vagina *dentata*-like cave mouths in Byzantine Nativities [Figures 1 – 5], Satan's figuring as a female both devouring and birthing "babies" in medieval depictions of Hell [Figures 9 – 12 and 14 – 16]. The innumerable

⁴⁴⁷ Searby, [n. 65], p. 253.

⁴⁴⁸ Steinberg, [n. 84], p. 65.

⁴⁴⁹ Bynum, Caroline Walker. "The Body of Christ in the Later Middle Ages: A Reply to Leo Steinberg," *Renaissance Quarterly*, 1986, No. (3), Vol. 39, pp. 399 – 439.

⁴⁵⁰ Steinberg, [n. 84], pp. 190 – 192.

depictions in which Christ is figured as the abject *Christus Patiens* modelled on a woman in childbirth [Figure 18] and in images of *The Birth of Ecclesia* with a “baby” born from Christ’s side wound [Figure 19]. The images of the side wound tipped into a vertical position and isolated as a subject for adoration [Figures 22 – 25 and 27] also participated in the visual effeminization of Christ. Steinberg’s observations about the medieval “emasculat[i]on” of Christ also invoke this anxiety: “[i]f Renaissance art reintroduces the genital member, the motive is not to reverse a previous “feminization” but to correct the appearance of “emasculat[i]on.”⁴⁵¹ St. Birgitta’s vision of the Nativity introduced a new genre, *The Adoration of the Child*, in which the Virgin kneels to adore the child.⁴⁵² Further, Birgitta’s vision transformed the iconography associated with the infant Christ. The formerly swaddled neonate Christ lying in a manger became a naked, shining infant radiating light and lying on the ground.⁴⁵³ As Hull has shown, Birgitta’s vision of the shepherds produced a further subgenre of the Nativity, the scene of the Virgin exposing Christ’s genitalia to the shepherds, the Magi, and others. Taking up the theme of the exposure of Christ’s genitalia, painters expanded the subgenre to include depictions of the infant Christ’s self-

⁴⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 480. Steinberg’s reference to a “previous feminization” is in response to his lengthy dialogue with Caroline Walker Bynum’s analysis of the figuring of Christ’s body as female see Bynum, [n. 449]; Also see Aers [n. 11]; Areford [n. 247], p. 77; Groenveld, [n. 115], p. 136ff; and Mills [n. 151] pp. 152ff for additional analysis and commentary on the Bynum/Steinberg dialogue and additional views on the sexualization, indeterminant, hetero and homoerotic nature of the depiction of Christ’s gender. For a useful contextualization of the Steinberg/Bynum dialogue in relation to recent scholarship about the presentation and gendering of Christ’s body see Lindquist, [n. 187], pp. 10 – 16.

⁴⁵² See Poley, [n. 64], Chapter 2, Footnote 64.

⁴⁵³ *Ibid*; and Hull, [n. 63], p. 78.

exposure in which he reveals his own genitalia by drawing aside his draperies.⁴⁵⁴ The indeterminant gender of *Christus Patiens* body, its figuring as a fruitful sacrifice, its female qualities of lactation and parturition in medieval art, continued in the figuring of Christ as *Christus Patiens* and in his depiction as *The Man of Sorrows*.⁴⁵⁵ Simultaneously, as Steinberg showed, late medieval and Renaissance depictions of the infant Christ foregrounded the infant Christ's penis. Christ's adult body figured as *Christus Patiens*, a potent locus of meditation and desire, acquired multitudinous, complex valences. As Sherry C. M. Lindquist observes:

...Christ's body was a dominant symbol, a motif used to communicate an official and consistent hegemonic message, but which is so potent that it comes to absorb into its "meaning-content most of the major aspects of human social life."⁴⁵⁶

In the end, the consistent hegemonic message that the figuring of Christ's naked, bleeding, adult body as well as the penis displaying infant body was made to communicate, was that Christ's body absorbed all of the roles involved in procreative activity - father, mother, and son, divine and human-sacrificed for the salvation of humankind.

The infant Christ's act of self-exposure is a "gift of physical demonstration" which Steinberg likens to Christ offering his wound to Thomas as physical proof of his resurrection.⁴⁵⁷ Beginning

⁴⁵⁴ Steinberg, [n. 84].

⁴⁵⁵ Images of the *Man of Sorrows* first emerged in a private devotional context becoming more public and frequent in altarpiece decoration by the fifteenth century. See Murray and Murray, [n. 28], pp. 299 – 300; Rubin, [n. 219], pp. 120 – 121, 308 – 310.

⁴⁵⁶ This quote from Lindquist, [n. 187], p. 11, incorporates a phrase from Turner, Victor. *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1967, pp. 43 – 44.

⁴⁵⁷ Steinberg, [n. 84], p. 644.

with the figuring of Christ as *Christus Patiens*, and in depictions of St. Francis's *Stigmatization*, *Doubting Thomas*, *Doubting Jerome*, *The Adoration of the Child*, and in depictions of *ostentatio genitalium*, mystical experience was translated into physical phenomena.⁴⁵⁸ To counter doubts, inconsistencies, anxieties, and denials surrounding miraculous events, the body was deployed as physical evidence; the "truth of the body" was presented to the viewer to examine, inspect, and assuage doubt.⁴⁵⁹ However, the visual verification tradition, the body as physical evidence of the truth of its own experience, was only available to authenticate the events and miracles experienced by the male body. The Virgin's female body was rarely depicted as marked by her participation in miraculous experience. There are no genres in medieval art that figure forth the Virgin's bodily truths. As Anne Higonnet observes, in the innumerable paintings of the Virgin and Child, it is not the mother's experience of either pregnancy or of parturition that are expressed. Instead, the Virgin is the throne or vessel upon which the "divine boy-child [is presented] to the worshipping world."⁴⁶⁰

As Most's analysis of the "canonical misinterpretation" of the Gospel of John demonstrates, the Gospel of John is ambiguous as to whether Thomas actually touched Christ's wounds. In the end, artists have been inspired by the idea of this haptic encounter and have expressed it powerfully. The probing of Christ's wound by Thomas, as Most has shown, is a visual tradition based on an ambiguous text, a product of artistic, or more likely, clerical invention. The magnetic attraction the subject exerts over artists from Duccio to Caravaggio and their viewers is

⁴⁵⁸ Davidson and Fritz-Morkin, [n.363], p. 451.

⁴⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶⁰ Higonnet, [n. 107], p. 17.

compelling evidence of the image's power to persuade. As Most, Steinberg, Hull, and many others have argued, art history is complicit in colluding in the image's power to persuade. Ignoring visual traditions with embarrassing content, failing to interrogate the asymmetric artistic handling of the bodies of Christ and the Virgin, misinterpreting the Gospel account of Christ's encounter with Thomas, art history, focusing on male bodies, colluded in denying the image's extraordinary power for the expression of female bodily experience.

Chapter 6: Anatomizing the Womb: *God the Creator*

In Chapter 2 of my dissertation I analyzed medieval images of scenes of the *Nativity*. Although the very subject of these images is the Virgin's childbirth of Christ, the actual event, the labor and delivery, is invisible. In this Chapter I consider images from medieval *Bible Moralisées* that graphically display *God the Creator*, portrayed as an unbounded man, in the act of labour, creating the world from his orb/womb. This *Bible Moralisée* frontispiece, [Figure 39] is the first depiction of God creating the cosmos with a compass.⁴⁶¹ As John Lowden observes, there is no iconographic precedent for this striking image.⁴⁶² The earliest *Bible Moralisées* were produced in or around Paris in the 1220s and in each of the four earliest extant *Bible Moralisées* the pictorial program is initiated by an image of *God the Creator* in the act of creating the cosmos.⁴⁶³ Each of the pages of the *Bible Moralisées* following the frontispieces is comprised of two columns of four compass-drawn circles containing a Biblical scene accompanied by a brief moralizing theme. These *Bible Moralisées* constitute "...the most extensive and ambitious attempt ever undertaken to provide the biblical narrative with images and illustrated commentary."⁴⁶⁴ The frontispiece images of *God the Creator* are the only full-page illuminations in the *Bible Moralisées*. Each of these frontispieces is executed with an extraordinary level of refinement. As their name denotes, frontispieces are located at the beginning of a codex or book, occupying the

⁴⁶¹ Lowden, John, *The Making of the Bibles Moralisées*. University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000 p. 56.

⁴⁶² *Ibid*, p. 47.

⁴⁶³ Guest, [n. 193], footnote 1, p. 38.

⁴⁶⁴ Lowden, [n. 461], p. 2.

first recto page and operating as visual indices and interpretive guides to the contents that follow. From the French *frontispice*, and the Latin *frontispicium*, frontispiece is a term borrowed from architecture, a reference to the façade or brow of a building: “the principal face or front of a building especially the decorated entry of a building.”⁴⁶⁵ Thus, a frontispiece provides an ornamental and visual entry or portal to the *Bible Moralisée* providing access to its moralizing content. Signaling the *Bible Moralisée*’s themes, the frontispiece alludes to both the structural design and creative processes involved in constructing the *Bible Moralisée*’s visual program. God the Creator’s orb, delineated by the compass clasped in God’s right hand, is the critical element in the book’s design. Each of the thousands of Biblical scenes comprising the books’ contents are enframed in circular medallions created by a craftsperson’s compass.⁴⁶⁶ God the Creator’s act of defining the orb’s form with his compass on the frontispiece brings the universe into being. Structurally, as the *Bible Moralisée*’s first circle, God’s compass drawn circle initiates all of the circles that follow. Thematically, God’s orb/womb is the universe from which all life is generated. As the text for Figure 39 states: “Here God creates heaven and earth, the sun and the moon, and all of the elements.”⁴⁶⁷ The circular frame of God’s orb is literally the prototype for the medallions encircling every person, thing, and event in the thousands of scenes that follow. God’s orb – like Pietro di Niccolo da Orvieto’s cosmic wound – is eternal, divine, and contains all life. At the same time, the frontispiece’s position within the codex, its rectangular shape, its large size, its curious asymmetrically coloured and perspectival frame, very deliberately sets it

⁴⁶⁵ Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, [n. 126], p. 1041.

⁴⁶⁶ Lowden, [n. 461], p. 56.

⁴⁶⁷ Guest, [n. 193], p. 54.

apart from the circular medallions that follow. In every respect the frontispiece's singularity demands attention.

God the Creator forcefully enacts the theme of God's uncontainability. The illuminator's strikingly original conceit – God the Creator walking into the framed pictorial field – conveys a temporal sense of beginning, the entering into a creative endeavor, and the strenuous energy and effort required to carry that endeavor to completion. God's rapid forward movement causes his cloak to billow behind him obscuring part of the frame. His left foot is planted within the pictorial field while the toes of his right foot – in the process of entering into the picture – extend beyond the frame into the beholder/reader's space. God's body – its volume, mass, movement, and energy – are skillfully modelled. Adhering to his moving body, God's intensely ultramarine tunic and gold cloak are pushed up around his forearms and his legs to accommodate his energetic movement. His clothes, although exceptionally elegant and well cut, are designed to allow his body to engage in strenuous physical activity. The series of curving folds in the fabric that clings to his back create a fulcrum at his elbow while the horizontal folds and shading of his tunic's sleeves pull the eye forward, enhancing the sense of his forward motion. Stooping, moving forward, his bare forearms exposed, God's left hand balances the orb while his right hand is poised on the compass. This depiction of God's right hand plays with the theme of *Dextera Domini*, Latin for God's right hand, used as a kind of visual shorthand for God the Father's presence in early medieval images in which God's hand protrudes down from the clouds of heaven. Every finger of the *Dextera Domini* is elegantly articulated, his little finger delicately extended over the compass: these are not the fingers of a manual labourer. God's right hand is a sensitive, intelligent instrument actively manipulating the compass, performing the complex tasks involved in the initiation of life and being in the cosmos. God the Creator's body –

energized and tense – is uncontainable, exhausting all available pictorial space. If God the Creator straightened his back to stand erect, he would break through the frame’s boundaries. His intention and will, illustrated by his facial expression of intense concentration and by the directional bent of his eyes, is focused on his monumental work. His bodily posture, his forward movement, the position of his right hand, and his intense concentration, radiate the significance of his work and his agency in its performance.

The orb, shown in cross-section, its outer edge demarcated by the compass is the same colour as the pictorial ground. An ultramarine blue layer with a lacy edge of crystalline white, conjures oceanic waves and is starkly contrasted against the orb’s black interior. The intense ultramarine blue of God the Creator’s tunic creates correspondences with the orb’s interior suggesting a common essence. The ultramarine blue is repeated in the wide frames beneath God’s feet, above his head, and in the narrow frames on either side. The rectangular frame’s disjointed, asymmetrical use of ultramarine blue creates a dynamic tension with the encircling blue within the orb. The rectangular shape of the frame – a shape equated in the Middle Ages with male rationality – contains the round female shape of the orb, but it cannot contain God the Creator. The deep ultramarine blue created by grinding fragments of the mineral lapis lazuli is the colour most associated in medieval art with the maphorion that envelops the Virgin. Lapis lazuli – mined only in Afghanistan during the Middle Ages and traded over great distances – was so rare and expensive, and so difficult to transform into a pigment that it was reserved for the most opulent manuscripts.⁴⁶⁸ The generous use of ultramarine blue in Figure 39 operates on several

⁴⁶⁸ Gaetani, Maria Carolina. “The Use of Egyptian Blue and Lapis Lazuli in the Middle Ages: The Wall Paintings of the San Saba Church in Rome.” *Studies in Conservation*, 2004, Vol. 49 (1), pp. 13 – 22, at p. 14.

registers. Clothing God and a layer of the womb/orb in Marian blue encodes them with the colour of the Virgin's female generativity. Further, the pigment's preciousness, together with the illumination's expensive gold ground, signal the significance and stature of the undertaking of both the *Bible Moralisée* and of God the Creator. Lapis lazuli and gold are materials that in the medieval imaginary held supernatural properties serving as intermediaries, negotiating "...between the world of matter and the world of spirit..."⁴⁶⁹ Like the rich colours and materiality of Pietro di Niccolo's cosmic wound, the rare and expensive materials of the womb/orb facilitate its function as a locus of devotional meditation.

At the orb's center a golem-like figure, comprised of a mass of yellowish clay, is in the process of being supernaturally brought to life through the imposition of God's compass. According to the accompanying text, the spherical lumps at the perimeter of the clay mass represent the sun and moon within a cluster of stars. The spherical shape at the top of the clay lump also looks like a featureless head; shadows on the "body" of the clay suggest the formation of proto-limbs – a fetus developing within the womb. God is depicted in the act of penetrating the unformed clay mass with his compass, imposing male order and form on the orb's inchoate matrix.

The frontispiece of a thirteenth century Parisian illumination from another *Bible Moralisée* [Figure 40] takes a different approach to its portrayal of God the Creator. A striking difference is this God the Creator's bodily attitude. I want to stress that this God the Creator adopts a familiar and authoritative visual tradition. His enthronement, together with the display of a precious object held on God the Creator's lap, quotes the physical attitude of the Virgin in innumerable

⁴⁶⁹ Kessler, [n. 273], p. 29.

images of the *Virgin Enthroned* [Figure 41]. In both genres, a seated figure regally enthroned within a confined space displays a precious object on their lap, knees spread apart to support the object's weight, and one hand cradling the object. In both, the image's organizing principle, at the center of the pictorial field, is the figure's "womb." The deliberate quoting of the Virgin's physical attitude, the central positioning of the orb on God's lap, emphasizes God the Creator's procreative function and the role of the orb/womb as a visual analogue of the cosmos.

However, it is noteworthy that the Virgin and God occupy space within their pictorial fields in a radically different manner. God's right shoulder and hair protrude into the space in front of the quatrefoil's multi-rimmed frame, his throne also extends into the pictorial plane; his preternaturally long toes grasp and extend over the quatrefoil's edge. Even though he is seated God is straining, engaged, active. Similarly, the four angels tugging at the quatrefoil's edges are working in unison, engaged in an effortful struggle, supporting the quatrefoil or mandorla.⁴⁷⁰ As the angels grapple with the quatrefoil's rim their bodies twist outward to face the viewer. The two angels at the bottom of the quatrefoil use their toes to gain purchase on the frame's edge and heave mightily. As the two angels at the top of the quatrefoil twist and hover while pulling at the quatrefoil's edges, their movement and effort cause their garments and wings to flutter above and behind them. Expanding before the beholder's eyes, pulled both behind and beyond the rectangular frame by the angels' combined efforts, the quatrefoil dilates like a cervix. Creating the cosmos is challenging, demanding strenuous physical activity. As in Figure 39 God's forearms are bare, with the fine cross hatching on his forearms and hands suggesting muscular definition, motion, and movement. Body and gaze are concentratedly fixed on his task. The

⁴⁷⁰ Lowden refers to the quatrefoil as "a mandorla of complex shape" [n. 461], p. 87.

emphasis on the fingers of God's right-hand reference the *Dextera Dei* as in Figure 39. Again, extraordinary care has been taken to articulate each of God's fingers. The ends of each of God's fingers contact the compass's stem in such an artful manner that it is almost as if they were covering the stops in a flute in order to make music with it. The configuration of God's fingers on the compass confounds and mesmerizes. Just below God's fingers, his red mantle forms a kind of lip above the orb/womb. Nestled in the red, wrinkled folds of his mantle and held over his abdomen, the orb/womb appears to be emerging from a vaginal opening. God's left hand grasps an edge as his thumb lies along the outer edge as if pulling open the womb/orb.

6.1 The Virgin Enthroned

In the *Virgin Enthroned*, [Figure 41] the Virgin sits within the confines of a universe contained within the altarpiece's arched frame that is static, hierarchical, still. Sedentary, sedate, and passive the Virgin's body is tightly constricted within her decorative tabernacle. The Virgin's body, enveloped in a voluminous blue maphorion, is completely covered, not even her shoes peep out from beneath her hem. Only her right hand emerges from the maphorion to rest motionlessly on the infant Christ's leg. Within the world contained by the altarpiece the only movement belongs to the infant Christ who raises his right hand in a solemn gesture of blessing. The Virgin's tabernacle does not expand, nor does she overstep or strain against the boundaries imposed upon her. Unlike the angels in *God the Creator*, the tiers of angels in the *Virgin Enthroned* do not twist, pull, heave and flutter to expand her tabernacle – they kneel and stand in motionless veneration. In comparison to the dynamic energy of God the Creator, a hypnotic spell has been cast over the somnolent inhabitants of the *Virgin Enthroned*. In *God the Creator* [Figures 39 and 40] the illuminator depicts the process of creating the universe in *medias res*, a clever visual strategy which involves the beholder's participation and emotional and intellectual

investment in the event. In paintings of post-Birgittine *Nativities* and *Virgin Enthroneds*, nothing happens. Instead of depicting one of Christian history's defining moments, the transcendental moment is passed over and a pedestrian portrait is substituted. God the Creator's work in creating the universe is direct, immediate, anticipated, foregrounded and celebrated.

The swirling circular inscriptions on the gold ground within *God the Creator's* quatrefoil reflect his creative activity whereas the Virgin's gold ground is solid and unmarked, uninscribed. In depictions of the *Virgin Enthroned* the Virgin is post-partum; her womb invisible; her creative materiality concealed. *God the Creator's* womb is exteriorized, visible, transparent, and parturient; he is in the act of inducing his cosmic labor with an arm of his compass. These two genres utilize pictorial space for opposite ends: to thematize containment in the *Virgin Enthroned* and uncontainability in *God the Creator*. Further, these two images operate differently within their visual contexts: the frontispiece of God the Creator is an entrance or portal giving access to the universe within the *Bible Moralisée's* pages. The universe depicted in Giotto's *Virgin Enthroned*, complete and closed, offers no access, only distanced contemplation.

6.2 Anatomizing the Womb

The quatrefoil's upper, lower, and middle lobes, and God's nimbus, echo and amplify the circular orb/womb. The horns of the quatrefoil adjacent to Christ's shoulders and knees mirror the triangular shape of the compass's apex. The rounded outline of the quatrefoil and the circular orb/womb are in complex conversations with the triangular shapes – symbols of the trinity. The transparent orb/womb in Christ's lap is anatomized, its interior layers opened to the viewer. The orb, like that in Figure 39 is comprised of a series of layers – an outside scalloped layer of textured green, a blue layer making correspondences with God's blue tunic, and a jagged white

crystalline edge highlighting the black recesses surrounding it. A primordial mass of clay pulses at the orb's centre. The orb's layers represent the four elements – earth, water, air, and fire – from which the earth, its oceans, and its firmament will develop. The orb's coloring and materiality – the contrast between the jagged white crystalline edge and the orb's black interior recesses – conspire to convulse the clay-colored tentacled mass at its center. A highly refined use of line, shading, and gradations of color impart a sophisticated spatial recession within the orb/womb and the spaces surrounding God and the angels. The orb's coupling of a dark color with a white border – a visual technique creating a flickering illusion within the image – was deployed in Bonne of Luxembourg's Psalter's isolated side wound [Figures 22 and 23] in the woodcut “The Measure of the Side Wound” [Figure 24] and in the juxtapositions of strokes of dark against light pigments in Pietro di Niccolo's cosmic wound [Figure 27]. In *God the Creator* this technique is extraordinarily effective: the beholder witnesses the exact moment of quickening. As God penetrates the matrix with the compass's arm, the cosmos comes into being. The anatomization of the womb/orb grants the beholder visual access to the birth of the cosmos. In this context God's left hand acts as midwife assisting in the delivery of the cosmos.

6.3 God the Creator: The *Singulus Solus*

Above *God the Creators'* painted frame gilt script on a red and blue ground states: HIC ORBIS FIGULUS DISPONIT SINGULUS SOLUS, [Figure 42, detail] [“Here the sole maker of the universe arranges each separate element”].⁴⁷¹

⁴⁷¹ Lowden, John, [n. 461], p. 89.

The image, already legibly figuring God as the sole generative force in constructing the cosmos receives textual reinforcement from the Latin inscriptions' insistence on God as the *singulus solus*: the sole maker. The likely source of the image of God with a compass is thought to be Plato's god the architect in *Timaeus*: "[s]eeking an image to represent the unknowable God [Plato] makes him an artist, a maker of images imitating an eternal model."⁴⁷² The Christian religion had been infiltrated by the influence of Greek thought as early as the Bible's Sapiential books and Psalms.⁴⁷³ The editors of the New Oxford Annotated Bible note that the author of the Wisdom of Solomon uses terms such as "formless matter" from Plato's *Timaeus*.⁴⁷⁴ However, the literal translation of "*figulus*" from the titular text [Figure 42] above the illustration of *God the Creator* is "potter" or "craftsman," and the literal translation of "*orbis*" is ring or circle.⁴⁷⁵ The wording of the title focuses the reader/viewer's attention on *God the Creator's* compass drawn orb. As earlier noted, the frontispiece's compass drawn circle is the *Bible Moralisée's* chief structural design element. The craftsperson or "*figulus*" who drew the *orbis* or circle with a compass in the depiction of *God the Creator* references his own act of creation in designing and

⁴⁷² Besançon, Alain. "The Philosophical Critique of the Image." *The Forbidden Image, An Intellectual History of Iconoclasm*. Todd, Jane Marie, Translator, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2000, p. 33; see also Zaitsev, Evgeny A. "The Meaning of Early Medieval Geometry: From Euclid and Surveyors' Manuals to Christian Philosophy." *Isis*, 1999, Vol. 90 (3), p. 536; Tachau, Katherine H. "God's Compass and Vana Curiositas: Scientific Study in the Old French Bible Moralisee." *The Art Bulletin*, 1998, Vol. 80 (1), p. 28.

⁴⁷³ Conrad, Rudolph. "In the Beginning: Theories and Images of Creation in Northern Europe in the Twelfth Century." *Art History*, 1999, Vol. 22 (1), p. 25.

⁴⁷⁴ "For your all-powerful hand which created the world out of *formless matter*." Coogan, [n. 20] Wisdom of Solomon, 11:17.

⁴⁷⁵ Lowden, [n. 461], p. 399.

executing the *Bible Moralisée*'s pictorial program. The inclusion of the compass in images of *God the Creator* together with the textual reference to the term “*figulus*” operate as an early instance of artistic self-fashioning.⁴⁷⁶

God the Creator's orb/womb in Figures 39 and 40 is a perfect circle. In medieval cosmological theories and in images the circle was the container for cosmological concepts and the ideal vehicle for visually expressing creation.⁴⁷⁷ In the Middle Ages the circle was deployed to convey and reconcile sacred, magical, mythological, cartographical, and historical knowledge. Naomi Reed Kline observes:

The circle was considered an ideal form to visually encompass Platonic and Aristotelian cosmological theories as understood by medieval scholars and encyclopedists whose task was to reconcile knowledge of the physical world with Christian beliefs.⁴⁷⁸

Circular diagrams or *rotae* borrowed from classical antiquity operated to visualize complex philosophical concepts such as the individual as microcosm in relation to the cosmos as macrocosm. Medieval *Mappae mundi*, “...symbolic representations, imaginings of the Christian world”⁴⁷⁹ rather than maps, adopted the circular shape of classical *rotae* to convey complex spatial and temporal relationships as well as to record information about the *oikoumene*: the known world.⁴⁸⁰ The medieval imaginary understood the *mappae mundi*'s circle symbolically as

⁴⁷⁶ Lowden, [n. 461], p. 88.

⁴⁷⁷ This sentence paraphrases Naomi Kline [n. 127], p. 232.

⁴⁷⁸ Kline, [n. 127], p. 10.

⁴⁷⁹ Lilley, Keith D. “City-Cosmos Imagined: Urban Mappings” in *City and Cosmos: The Medieval World in Modern Form*. Reaktion Books, 2009, p. 30.

⁴⁸⁰ Kline, [n. 127], pp. 10 – 12.

a manifestation of God's act of creating the world – a world that contains all creation.⁴⁸¹ In the Middle Ages the circle had a special allegorical meaning: while “containing” in itself all the other geometrical figures, it at the same time “encompassed” the whole cosmos.⁴⁸²

Some medieval *mappae mundi* such as the *Ebstorf Mappa Mundi*, mid-thirteenth century, [destroyed in 1943] superimpose Christ's body on a circular map of the world [Figure 43].⁴⁸³ As Kline notes: “The motif of the map as encompassed by Christ's body...[is found in numerous examples]...so that we may assume it was commonly understood and implied.”⁴⁸⁴ At the *Ebstorf Mappa Mundi's* apex is a representation of the *sudarium*, the imprint of Christ's blood and sweat on the cloth given to Christ on the road to Calvary. The bloodstains from the crown of thorns are visible on the imprint of Christ's face and highlighted by the *sudarium's* red border. Here, the *sudarium* operates in the same way as it does in the woodcut of the *Wounds of Christ with Symbols of the Passion* [Figure 24] and in the *Side Wound on a Cloth* [Figure 25] as a symbol of the Passion, an embodiment of Christ, and as a potent *apotropaia*. Christ's hands bearing their stigmata reach out from each side of the circular map. At the bottom of the map, Christ's bloodied feet support the weight of the world. In the *Ebstorf Mappa Mundi's* construction of Christ's relation to the world, the crisscrossing rivers and the ocean circling its outer ring, are nourished by Christ's body and blood. The world in the *Ebstorf* map is coeval with Christ's

⁴⁸¹ Kline, [n. 127], p. 10.

⁴⁸² Zaitsev, [n. 472], p. 539.

⁴⁸³ For additional extant *mappae mundi* that constitute Christ's body as the world see Kline, [n. 127], Figs. 8.2; 8.3, pp. 226 – 227.

⁴⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p. 232.

crucified body: no physical world exists beyond Christ.⁴⁸⁵ Christ's bloodied face, hands, and feet; and his embrace, of the world operate to remind the viewer of the crucified Christ's salvific role as mother of humankind. The crucified Christ's embrasure of the world visually extends the medieval trope of *Christus Patiens* embracing the beholder from the cross, analyzed by Sara Lipton.⁴⁸⁶ *God the Creator's* bodily encompassment of the *orbis terrarium* [Figure 40] conveys the same message as the Ebstorf *mappa mundi* equating Christ and cosmos: medieval maps visualize God's body both as the genesis of the world and coeval with the world. The artistic handling of the theme in *God the Creator* [Figure 40] is perhaps the most vividly expressive – God both induces his labour and performs his own midwifery as he gives birth to the cosmos. Utilizing a cartographic language of knowledge, exploration, history, and “science,” *mappae mundi* and maps were mobilized as part of late medieval Christian Europe's intellectual apparatus.⁴⁸⁷ As J.B. Harley observes: a map “structures the geography it depicts according to a set of beliefs about the way the world should be and presents this construction as truth.”⁴⁸⁸

An abstract equivalent of the *mappae mundi's* superimposition of Christ's body on the world is the medieval T-O map in which a circular earth (the “O”) is transected by a tau cross (the “T”). The T-O map's construction Christianizes the classical *rota* form imposing Christianity on the

⁴⁸⁵ Hillis, Ken. “The Power of Disembodied Imagination: Perspective's Role in Cartography.” *Cartographica*, 1994, Vol. 31 (3), p. 5.

⁴⁸⁶ Lipton, [n. 6].

⁴⁸⁷ Harley, J. B. “Maps, Knowledge and Power” *Geographic Thought – a Praxis Perspective*. 2009, Henderson, George and Waterstone, Marvin Eds. London and New York: Routledge, 2009, p. 131.

⁴⁸⁸ *Ibid*, p. 138.

three continents it contains: Asia, Europe, and Africa [Figure 44]. The “T” of the tau cross also connects the map with Christ’s crucified body. Keith Lilley observes the transection of a circular earth with the Tau cross – ubiquitous in *rotae*, diagrams, city maps, and *mappae mundi* – was understood to express the imposition of God’s order in geometrical form on the world’s formless matter – a masculine form imposed on formless female matter.⁴⁸⁹ The T-O maps’ diagrammatic schema condenses the world into precise, manageable, gendered concepts within the circle’s perfect form. The woodcut *Wound of Christ with Symbols of the Passion* [Figure 24] in which the vaginally shaped isolated side wound is partially transected by a cross deploys a schema that operates in a similar fashion to that of the T-O map: male form is imposed on female matter. A similar graphical scheme is found in the *Bible Moralisées* illustrations of *God the Creator* [Figures 39 and 40] where the compass’s vertical arm transects the compass’s horizontal arm forming a cross on the inchoate mass of the *orbis terrarium*. The cross, visible in both illustrations of *God the Creator* is particularly legible in the image of God stooping over the *orbis terrarium* in the act of creating the cosmos [detail, Figure 45].

6.4 The Male as Effective and Active Principle of Procreation – The Female as Container

Thus, in every imaginable category of medieval visual media – monumental *mappae mundi*, *rotae*, T-O maps, psalter illustrations, frontispieces, woodcuts, prints, illuminations, *Bible Moralisées*, miniatures, diagrams, altarpieces, paintings, frescoes, and the crucifixes suspended from every altar, all reinforced by church exegesis, texts, sermons, and devotional practices, a consistent message is promulgated – God’s male body is responsible for humankind’s existence and salvation. Underpinning this medieval media illustrating God as the Creator of the universe

⁴⁸⁹ Lilley, [n. 479].

are ancient theories about the male and female contribution to procreation. Aristotle's theory of procreation credited men with three of the four causes that contribute to procreation.⁴⁹⁰ The least important, though necessary, material cause was female. For Aristotle the male was the effective and active principle, the female the passive and receptive. Male semen activated female matter producing the fetus's form and defining character.⁴⁹¹ Aristotle's causative theory of procreation adopted by medieval and early modern religion, medicine, and natural philosophy understood the womb to function solely as a container.⁴⁹² Medieval natural philosophers adopted Aristotle's male/form and female/matter paradigm to portray generation as the impression of active male form on passive female matter."⁴⁹³ Further, medieval natural philosophers – like classical theorists – extended the application of the form/ matter paradigm to include not only the human reproductive process but also the creative artistic process.⁴⁹⁴ According to Aristotle, the female did not generate life: "The female, as female, is passive, and the male, as male, is active and the principle of movement comes from him."⁴⁹⁵

⁴⁹⁰ Aristotle, *On the Generation of Animals*, Platt, Arthur, Trans., Adelaide: University of Adelaide, 2015, p. 19.

⁴⁹¹ *Ibid*, p. 20.

⁴⁹² Bullough, [n. 138], p. 485; Jacobs, [n.17], p. 79.

⁴⁹³ Park, Katharine. "Impressed Images: Reproducing Wonders" Jones, Caroline A. and Galison, Peter, [Eds.] *Picturing Science, Producing Art*, New York and London: Routledge Press, 1998, pp. 257.

⁴⁹⁴ I am indebted to Fredrika H. Jacobs article [n. 17] for her clear elucidation of the application of Aristotle's form versus matter paradigm in medieval and early modern thought.

⁴⁹⁵ Aristotle, [n. 490], p. 2, 3, 194b – 195a, 40, quoted in Jacobs, [n. 17], p. 79.

An explosion of interest in divine creation beginning in the twelfth century produced an efflorescence of images of creation and of God the creator.⁴⁹⁶ Plato's model "...of a Creator forming the world in accordance with a pre-existent pattern... contribute[d], in the twelfth century, to the establishment or re-establishment of an important analogy between the creating God and the fabricating [in both senses of the term] artist".⁴⁹⁷ In Classical thought artistic creativity and reproductive processes were perceived as similar: the male was equated with the creative process and the female with the artist's medium or material.⁴⁹⁸ Beginning in the medieval period the intellect began to be ascribed an increasingly important role in artistic creation. By the early modern period, art theorists considered art as belonging within the realm of the intellect.⁴⁹⁹ Women, according to Aristotle, though capable of rationality were defective in intellectual capacity.⁵⁰⁰ Aristotle's ontological model of procreation adopted as a model for artistic conception meant that only males had the creative potential of *inventione*, the ability to reshape imperfect matter into ideal form.⁵⁰¹ As Carolyn Korsmeyer has observed the gendering

⁴⁹⁶ Hanning, R.W. "Ut Enim Faber...Sic Creator" Divine Creation as Context for Human Creativity In the Twelfth Century." Davidson, Clifford, [Ed.] *Word, Picture, and Spectacle*. Kalamazoo, Mich.: Western Michigan University, 1984, p. 96.

⁴⁹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 99.

⁴⁹⁸ Jacobs, [n. 17], pp. 80 – 81.

⁴⁹⁹ Garrard, Mary. Review of "The Woman Artists of Bologna by Laura M. Ragg." *Women's Art Journal*, 1 (1980/81), pp. 58 – 64.

⁵⁰⁰ Jacobs, [n. 17], pp. 85 – 86.

⁵⁰¹ *Ibid*, pp. 89 – 90.

of the concept of the artist has an ancient history.⁵⁰² Equally ancient was male appropriation of the language of gestation and parturition to describe male artistic creativity.⁵⁰³ Women artists were understood to be capable of copying or reproducing a particular object or figure but only men were capable of perfecting an imperfect subject through their artistic *inventione*.⁵⁰⁴ Based upon the form/matter paradigm a qualitative distinction was made between technical facility and technical prowess enhanced by artistic *inventione*. The type of beauty created by artistic *inventione* is self-reflexive, coming not from the artist's subject but from the artist's technique, intellect, and creative powers.⁵⁰⁵ The notion that the male was the active and effective cause of procreation and of visual artistic creativity is embedded in medieval visual culture and has enjoyed a long afterlife. As Michael Camille notes:

The fact that God's creative act was associated with the technology of artistic production is of enormous significance for artistic practice in this period. In earlier medieval scenes of the creation, the universe was depicted as coming into being through the pointing finger of God's speech-gesture, as realized through God's word ["Let there be light"].⁵⁰⁶

Unsurprisingly, male artists promoted the notion that their artistic creativity, like God's creation of Adam, partook of the divine. *God the Creator's* [Figure 42] thirteenth century artist's use of the term *figulus* – the term for a potter or maker – to describe God is an early example of an artist self-consciously connecting the divine creation of the cosmos with his own artistic craft and

⁵⁰² Korsmeyer, [n. 18], p. 14.

⁵⁰³ Battersby, Christine. *Gender and Genius: Towards a Feminist Aesthetics*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989, p. 39.

⁵⁰⁴ Jacobs, [n. 17], pp. 95 – 96.

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 88 – 89.

⁵⁰⁶ Camille, [n. 364], p. 79.

conception.⁵⁰⁷ Art history has been complicit in nurturing the notion of genius as a gendered attribute. Until very recently it was understood that during the Middle Ages women were not involved in the production of illuminated texts. Recent research challenges the notion of gendered production of illuminated texts and provides evidence that during the Middle Ages there were women illuminators of exceptional skill. A recent, extraordinary archeological finding corrects the long-held view that scribal illumination was performed solely by males – usually monks. Microscopic particles of lapis lazuli were found in the dental calculus of a twelfth century skeleton.⁵⁰⁸ Artistic practice of wetting the hairs of the brush with the tip of the tongue to make a fine point accounted for the presence of particles of pigment on the skeleton’s teeth. Osteological and genetic examination confirmed the skeleton’s gender was female. Since lapis lazuli was the “quintessential luxury trade good” it was reserved for the most expensive illuminations and was only handled by the most highly skilled illuminators.⁵⁰⁹ Recent historic research proves that in the Middle Ages religious women were often engaged in both the scribal and illumination aspects of book production.⁵¹⁰

Returning to Figures 39 and 40, it is evident that by utilizing his draftsman’s compass God the Creator is about to mobilize procreative and artistic *inventione* to transform imperfect female

⁵⁰⁷ Lowden, [n. 461] p. 88.

⁵⁰⁸ Radini, A. et al., “Medieval women’s early involvement in manuscript production suggested by lapis lazuli identification in dental calculus.” *Science Advances*, [Jan 09, 2019], Vol. 5, No. 1, p. 1.

⁵⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵¹⁰ Beach, A.I., *Women as Scribes: Book Production and Monastic Reform in Twelfth Century Bavaria.*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004; Cyrus, C. J., *The Scribes for Women’s Convents in Late Medieval Germany.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009.

matter into an ideal form of beauty. *God the Creator's* attribute is a compass manipulated with intelligence and skill, the *Virgin Enthroned's* attribute is a vase or container. Instead of passively sitting, God the Creator is animate, wielding technologies, depicted in the very act of creation. Comparing the artistic handling of God's male body and the Virgin's female body with the lens of Aristotle's male/form female/matter paradigm, the Virgin's passive body and God the Creator's active body visually articulate classical and medieval theories of the female and male contribution to procreation. Figured in the same visual tradition as the *Virgin Enthroned* but uncontainable, active, and creative, God supplants the Virgin's generative role. Just as *Christus Patiens'* "birth-giving" side wound appropriated the Virgin's vagina constituting Christ as mother of humankind, *God the Creator's* orb dispossesses the Virgin of her womb.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

My dissertation implicates every category of medieval visual media – from phantasmagoric frescoes of hell to miniature illuminations of the isolated side wound – in the church’s campaign to persuade medieval audiences that the male body was solely responsible for the existence of humankind. As the chapters of this dissertation have shown the comparison of the artistic handling of the Virgin’s and Christ’s bodies excavates the contextual origins of their asymmetric visual treatment exposing the cannibalization of the Virgin’s body to re-gender Christ’s. The visual mechanisms deployed in the gendering of the Virgin and Christ were reinforced by the church’s textual, liturgical, devotional, and ritual practices. Medieval Christian traditions – sermons recounting Christ’s suffering during the Passion; ascription of sacred valences to Christ’s skin; wounds blood and pain; the adoration of the isolated side wound and the sacramental consumption of Christ’s body and blood in the eucharist – fostered an intimate engagement with Christ’s body.

My dissertation examines the church’s complex and elaborate mobilization of visual strategies and mechanisms to persuade medieval audiences that the male body was salvific and generative while the female body was dangerous. As I have argued the church’s visual strategies were diverse and flexible. I have shown that the Virgin’s and Christ’s visual representation could be fundamentally altered or gently adjusted to harmonize with the church’s agenda. Images’ multiple functions, purposes, and powers were infinitely malleable. Pictures’ aesthetic enchantment and optical properties enhanced their role as loci of contemplative meditation. As sites of devotional contemplation images operated to assist a beholder’s negotiation from the material to the spiritual world. Certain images were invested with potent apotropaic-magico-

religious powers. Pictorial narratives told stories – visually articulating, reinforcing, and normalizing beliefs promulgated by the church. Church exegesis invested images with didactic importance and depictions of miraculous events assisted in assuaging congregants' doubts. Claims that images replicated the precise size and scale of Christ's side wound offered physical evidence of the events depicted. Medieval artists and artisans deployed their exceptional visual skills to delight, seduce, normalize, affect, bribe, threaten, visually articulate and reinforce beliefs, bedazzle and – most importantly – to persuade.

The figuring of the Virgin's female body in medieval Christian art participated in a Western visual tradition extending back to ancient Greece that viewed female genitalia as shameful. Although the Virgin was exalted for her purity, chastity, modesty, and virtue she was a member of a despised gender and was thereby required to conceal her body. Thus, even in images celebrating the birth of Christ, the Virgin is depicted post-partum, her vagina invisible, her body concealed, carefully dressed, cleansed of birthing fluids, and unsoiled by blood or water. In post-Birgittine *Nativities* the Virgin is depicted as premenarchal to eliminate any threat of womanly carnality. The Virgin's chaste body and the birth of her divine son were inappropriate subjects for Christian art because the church considered the parturient female body and birth work repellant and disgusting. As a consequence, childbirth – an act which exposed the naked female body to view and caused uterine blood and waters to flow – was invisible in medieval visual culture except in images of Satan in hell. The concealment of the Virgin's body and her birth work communicated a powerful message that the female body and its birth work were inherently shameful.

Paradoxically, although women's sexual and reproductive systems were reviled by the church, their form permeated every aspect of medieval visual culture. The form of the vagina and womb – *vesica piscis*, mandorla, pubic triangles, baptismal fonts, cave mouths, hell mouths, the Virgin's blood red vagina – shaped travelling bed, Christ's isolated side wound rubricated and tipped vertically, and *God the Creator's* orb/womb – saturate medieval iconography. The visual vocabulary of the vaginal and womb forms initially deployed in Byzantine Nativities constructed the Virgin as a fertile pagan mother goddess. The visual language of female fertility, erased in post-Birgittine *Nativities*, was appropriated to figure *Christus Patiens'* abjection. An unremitting barrage of sermons, texts, devotional practices, and images taught medieval audiences to adore Christ's broken, bleeding body; a body that would otherwise have been repellant. Identical textual, devotional, and visual strategies could have been deployed to teach medieval audiences to celebrate and adore depictions of the act of the female body that ensures the existence of humankind.

Appropriating the language of parturition and maternity the church compared Christ's nourishing of the spirit to a breast-feeding mother. During the Mass, Christians were instructed to imagine Christ embracing them to his naked body and breastfeeding them. The vocabulary of female generativity and maternity was appropriated to envision the crucified Christ's broken body giving birth on the cross. Medieval texts and images encouraged adoration of those qualities of Christ's body that were divine and salvific – milk giving, permeable, fragmented, abject, bloody, leaking, and generative – feminine qualities considered repellant when associated with the actual female body. Christians were tutored to cultivate an affective, intimate, corporeal engagement with Christ's body; to envision embracing Christ, kissing his lips, sucking milk from his breasts, touching and kissing his wounds. Christ's naked skin, blood, suffering, and pain were invested

with sacred valences encouraging a rapt adoration of his body. To envision spiritual union with Christ, Christians deployed the vocabulary of physical and sexual union. Devotional practices focusing on Christ's wounds recount saints' and mystics' visions of nursing from and penetrating Christ's side wound to achieve mystical union. Saturating medieval visual culture with crucifixes, paintings of *Christus Patiens* and images of the side wound normalized the male body as parturitive. Depending on context and audience, physical contact with Christ's body – suggested in sermons and texts and enacted at the end of the Passion sermon – could signify affectively as well as hetero-erotically or homo-erotically. Christ's androgynous, vulnerable, naked body was a receptive site for projections of desire across the gender spectrum.

What I have also argued in this dissertation is that the visual mechanisms mobilized to depict the female body and parturition as monstrous are strikingly subversive and inventive. Central Italian frescoes envisioning the female body and childbirth as Satanic are terrifyingly visceral. It is difficult to fathom how medieval audiences responded to these gigantic frescoes inhabited by naked human bodies and sexualized animals wielding grotesque implements perpetrating bizarre sexual tortures. Requiring exceptional artistic imagination and technique, depictions of Satan reigning in hell offered the most talented medieval artists an unprecedented opportunity to exploit the female nude as an immense, hairy, grotesque, birthing beast. Giotto's, Buonamico Buffalmacco's, and Taddeo di Bartolo's frescoes visually articulate the church's view that the pregnant female body was distorted and repellant. Standing in an archetypal birth squat atop a dung pile of human bodies pushing a "baby" out of her vagina, Satan visually expresses Augustine's view of women as vile and corruptible. Medieval artists' depiction of the female womb as a microcosm of hell pictorially articulates Augustine's view that the womb was evil. Looming, immense and insatiable, these feminized Satans give form to a deeply rooted fear of

female sexual and reproductive power. In these frescoes, the aspects of the female body that so revolted the medieval imaginary and rendered childbirth an unsuitable subject for Christian art are fully displayed. For medieval women beholders these images communicated a clear message: only a destructive, monstrous, demonic Satan exposed its genitalia and birth work to view.

Pietro di Niccolo da Orvieto's painting of a severed pink wound, stretched elliptically, displayed in tight close up, makes visible the isolated side wound's double excision. Wrenched from its original embodied context and triumphantly displayed, the wound opens a discourse beyond appropriation and displacement – most productively understood as *spolia*. Inhering in the notion of *spolia* is the theft of something precious to enhance an object in a culturally different context. *Spolia* conveys a transgressive, violent, and bloody taking of a precious object to display as a trophy – a public expression of conquest and power. To produce its triumphal effect *spolia* must reveal its two distinct artistic or architectural contexts: the side wound's potency relies upon the viewer's subconscious recognition of its original context as a vagina. In depictions representing the isolated side wound vertically, homage is paid to its original unstated context as vagina while estranging it from its stated context as Christ's horizontally oriented side wound. Pietro di Niccolo's representation of the wound between a vertical and horizontal orientation, its anamorphosis or betweenness, together with its use of colour, vividity and convulsive brush work magnify its visual potency energizing a *spolia* aesthetic. *Spolia's* very nature is to produce an absence in the object's original context. The appropriation and displacement of the visual language of female creative materiality – the violent theft of the Virgin's expressive potential – created a void in the medieval visual record. The display of conquered *spolia* by the victor also operates as an expression of status and power. Inhering in the appropriation and displacement of the Virgin's creative materiality onto Christ's body in images of *Christus Patiens* are *spolia's*

potent elements: a shift of objects or materials from one context to another: plunder or violent taking; blood, display, and empowerment. Pietro di Niccolo's small scale devotional portrait of the Virgin and Child coupled with the incandescent cosmic wound on its verso, pictorially narrates the plunder of the Virgin's expressive potential to construct Christ as the mother of humankind. Pietro di Niccolo's vertiginously abstract side wound's interplay between materiality, optical properties, spiritual engagement, aesthetic enchantment, and *spolia*, thematizes the church's mobilization of diverse and compelling visual strategies.

The extremes of the aesthetic spectrum – from grotesque visions of the female body as Satan and childbirth as monstrous to the exquisite, mesmerizing illuminations of the isolated side wound – were mined for the same ends. Highly refined visual techniques, bedazzling optical properties, and the use of rare, precious materials mobilized an aesthetic enchantment seducing the beholder. As the Virgin's powerful Byzantine role was diminished in post-Birgittine *Nativities* the viewer was charmed and distracted by her delicate, beguiling replacement. Niccolo di Tommaso's use of warm gold and rose tones in his gently illuminated cave, the dazzling angel-filled, star struck sky in his *Adoration of the Child*, and his pretty, pious Virgin enchant the beholder. Multiple visual tactics were mobilized to foster adoration of a rubricated, sometimes bleeding, vaginal-shaped side wound. Marshalling every visual, textual, numerical, and magico-religious technique in its impressive arsenal, the church engaged the beholder: visually suspending disbelief. Images of the isolated side wound were a magnet for medieval artisanal visual wizardry. Facilitating their function as sites of meditation and spiritual union, images of the side wound mobilized highly sophisticated optical properties – gradations in colour, atmospheric perspective, recession into depth – producing effects of three-dimensionality. Swirling patterns, abstractions, painted or fictive stone, gold grounds, and symbolic colours

produced ethereal, otherworldly effects. Visually enframing wounds in white, or in striking contrasting colours, deploying techniques of spatial recession, caused wounds to pulse, oscillate, and convulse. Medieval artisans animated the wound making it appear alive, uncontainable. Hypnotizing optical properties bedazzled beholders of the isolated side wound facilitating its function as a locus of devotional contemplation. As Georges Didi-Huberman observes, medieval artists designed abstractions and non-figural patterns to disrupt vision, evoking spiritual associations, enabling anagogic modes of vision.⁵¹¹ Images of the wound incorporating swirling patterns resembling painted or fictive marble – a stone with potent symbolic valences for Christian beholders – enhanced its hallucinatory effects. Marble, understood to be purified earth suspended in water, regarded as a physical expression of God’s creativity in nature was, in the medieval imaginary, connected with the origins of the world. Mesmerizing patterns, overt materiality, and precious, rare pigments such as lapis lazuli and gold imparted symbolic meaning aiding devotional contemplation of the image. Focusing on the image’s precious materiality the beholder’s gaze negotiated between the secular and spiritual worlds. Enrapturing materiality, aesthetic beauty, animation, disruption of vision, and magico-religious powers amplified the operation, value, and status of these extraordinary images.

The depicted side wound’s scale, understood to replicate the precise size of Christ’s actual side wound, magnified its talismanic powers. The wound’s exact measurement – underwriting its devotional and apotropaic functions – provided the viewer with a spatial knowledge of Christ’s body fomenting an intense corporeal, emotional, and spiritual engagement. Printed images of the side wound were hung in houses to protect their inhabitants. Pregnant women wore images of the

⁵¹¹ Didi-Huberman, [n. 14], pp. 55, 90.

isolated side wound in amulets next to their skin to safeguard against death in childbirth. If kissed and prayed to with remorse the side wound protected the believer from sudden death and granted indulgences from purgatory. Text and prayers accompanying images instructed the beholder how to engage with the side wound – to adore it, to praise it, to pray to it, to kiss it, to meditate upon it, and to seek hope of eternal life. Woodcuts incorporating images of the bleeding side wound imprinted on Veronica's veil – a sacred relic – intensified the wound's potent magical properties. The Veronica veil, due to its status as an *acheiropoietos* – an object made without human intervention – was understood to possess miraculous healing powers, even when reproduced as a print.

Prints, illuminations, and paintings of the side wound offered the viewer multiple types of evidence of the events they represented. The precise measurements of Christ's side wound offered physical evidence of Christ's existence, of the crucifixion, of the wound inflicted by Longinus's spear while Christ hung on the cross, and of the events of the Passion. The claim that the image was the exact measurement of Christ's side wound incorporated the concept of *autoptic* viewing, an eyewitness viewing, an assurance that the events depicted and described were witnessed, recorded, and reproduced – a guarantee of their authenticity. The power of physical phenomenon inscribed on the body as evidence of miraculous events was available to the male bodies of Christ and St. Francis – the male body bore witness to its own lived experience. The male body spoke while the Virgin's female body was denied corporeal speech.

As noted above in connection with the frescoes of Satan presiding in hell, images visually articulated the beliefs the church sought to promulgate. Images of Satan reinforced and entrenched opinions of the pregnant female body as monstrous and grotesque, the threat of

insatiable female carnality, the womb as evil, and the toxicity of women's foul leakages. Images of the passive inactive *Virgin Enthroned* and the active, creative *God the Creator* visually articulated antique and medieval views about the male and female contribution to procreation and the appropriate roles of women and men. The visual, textual, corporeal, affective, and aesthetic interpretive frameworks identified in my dissertation developed templates for the construction of gender that endure to the present day. Images of an enthroned *God the Creator* visualize God as the *singulus solus* – the sole creator of the universe – depicted in the very act of creating the universe. God's womb/orb is exteriorized and visible, transparent and parturient – the viewer is witness to *God the Creator's* generative activity. In contrast, depictions of the *Virgin Enthroned* conceal her birth work, her womb is invisible, and the viewer is witness to her passivity. Significantly, images depicting the active male and the passive female visually articulate classical, antique, and medieval theories of the male and female contribution to procreation. The concept that the male was the active and effective cause of procreation and the female was the passive container inheres in depictions of *God the Creator* and the *Virgin Enthroned*. The depiction of *God the Creator* as an artisan in the act of creating has had far reaching consequences for the male artist and the role of art. In Classical thought artistic creativity and human reproductive processes were perceived as similar – the male was equated with the creative process and the female with the artist's medium or material. As art began to be considered as an intellectual activity in the late medieval period, women were excluded; though capable of rationality, women were considered defective in intellectual capacity. The adoption of Aristotle's ontological model of procreation as a model of the creative artistic process meant that only males had the ability to reshape imperfect matter into ideal form. Women artists were understood to be capable of copying or reproducing a particular object or figure but only men

could perfect an imperfect subject through their artistic *inventione*. Images of the active, creative male body and the inactive, unproductive, female body are ubiquitous in medieval visual culture. If the only evidence of human procreation and reproductive processes available to a medieval observer were visual art, that observer would be entitled to assume the male body was solely responsible for the generation of humankind. Gender was manipulated in medieval Christian visual culture to communicate powerful and enduring perceptions about the role of women and men: of the female and male contribution to procreation; and their contribution to the origin and existence of mankind. Images – together with the apparatus of religion and natural philosophy – sustained and reinforced the naturalization of the inversion of gendered biological roles.

The images examined in my dissertation – Giotto's, Buffalmacco's, and di Bartolo's parturitive Satans; Jean Le Noir's novel illumination of a throbbing, uncontainable side wound; Pietro di Niccolo da Orvieto's abstract, painterly, incandescent cosmic side wound; and Niccolo di Tommaso's golden, glowing, *Adoration of the Child*, are among the first frescoes, illuminations, paintings, and panel paintings to be associated with the hand of a particular artist. These images give form to artists reveling in their powers of invention, examining their artistic roles and the power of art to create, fantasize, transform, and persuade. Striking, vivid, and self-reflexive, these images were designed to inspire wonder and cause the eye to linger. These paintings, frescoes, and illuminations have enjoyed an enduring afterlife because they were produced by the period's most talented, versatile, and imaginative artists. The aesthetic enchantment, mesmerizing optical properties, magico-religious elements and subversive phantasmagoric visions animating these images worked their magic on the medieval beholder and continue their work on present day viewers. The authority and familiarity of these images, their presence and value as devotional objects, their aesthetic richness, and their status as devotional and sacred art,

made them unassailable for centuries. Accordingly, for centuries images celebrated the male body for its parturitive qualities while the female body's birth work was concealed and stolen. Medieval visual culture negates women's bodies but also their interiority – their ability to visually communicate physical, emotional, mental, intellectual, and psychological lived experience. The church's authoritative monopoly over visual, textual, religious, and social expression asserted the female body's dangerous carnality. Extraordinarily, art's status, the church's authoritative exegesis, the sacred nature of images, their aesthetics and ubiquity, in addition to the very concept of representation – the re-presentation of objects and figures – normalized and made plausible Christ as mother of humankind. The repercussions have endured. Even today, contemporary exhibitions of images of childbirth are met not only with controversy but also with disgust and outrage. Carmen Winant's June 2018 exhibition at the MOMA entitled "My Birth" of 2000 images from found documents with photographs of women at different stages of pregnancy and phases of childbirth received negative reactions, offended some viewers, and elicited comments that birth is and should be a very private process.⁵¹²

⁵¹² Kroell, Alicia. "Carmen Winant, My Birth." *Hyperallergic.com*, June 7, 2018.

Figures



Figure 1, Artist Unknown, *Scenes of the Nativity*, c. 11th century, Monastery of Mount St. Catherine's, Sinai



Figure 2, Artist Unknown Detail, Nativity, *Scenes of the Nativity*, 11th century Monastery of Mount St. Catherine's, Sinai



Figure 3, Artist Unknown, Detail Nativity and Midwives Bathing Christ Child, *Scenes of the Nativity*, 11th century, Monastery of Mount St. Catherine's, Sinai



Figure 4, Guido di Graziano, Detail, Nativity, c. 1278 – 1302, *San Pietro in Trono*, Pinacoteca Nazionale, Siena



Figure 5, Artist Unknown, *Nativity of Christ*, 15th century, Greek Institute Museum, Venice



Figure 6, Artist Unknown, *Romanos the Melodist*, Calendar book Known as the Menologion of Emperor Basil II, [976 – 1025] Bibliotheca Apostolica, Vatican



Figure 7, Niccolo di Tommaso, *The Adoration of the Child*, 1372, Pinacoteca Vaticana



Figure 8, Stefan Lochner, *The Adoration of the Child*, 1445, Alte Pinakothek, Munich



Figure 9, Giotto, Detail, Satan, *Last Judgment*, c. 1305, Arena Chapel, Padua



Figure 10, Giotto, Detail, Satan “birthing” *Last Judgment*, c. 1305, Arena Chapel, Padua



Figure 11, Giotto, Detail, the Rivers of Hell, *Last Judgment*, c. 1305, Arena Chapel, Padua



Figure 12, Giotto, Detail, the Rivers of Hell and Satan, *Last Judgment*, c. 1305, Arena Chapel, Padua



Figure 14, Buonamico Buffalmacco, Detail, Satan, 1338, Camposanto, Pisa



Figure 15, Taddeo di Bartolo, Detail, Satan, c. 1410, Collegiata, San Gimignano



Figure 16, Taddeo di Bartolo, Detail, Satan's "Netherface," c. 1410, Collegiata, San Gimignano

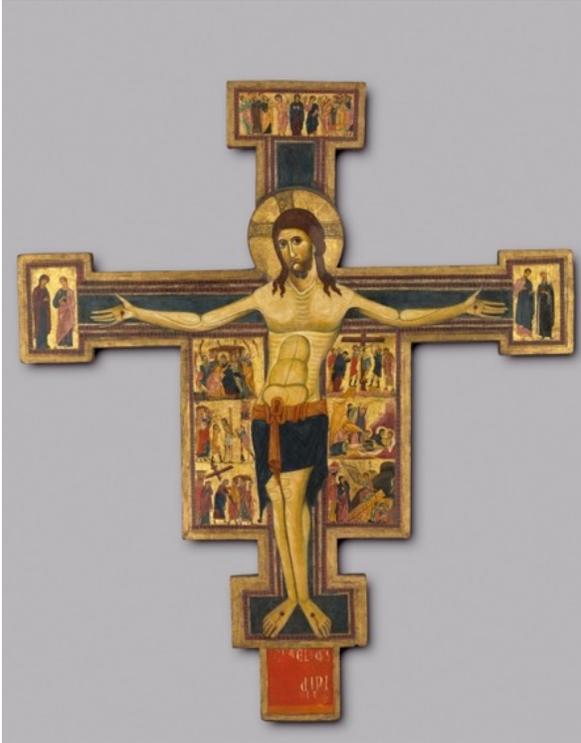


Figure 17, Artist Unknown, *Christus Triumphans*, c. 1230 – 1240, Cleveland Museum of Art

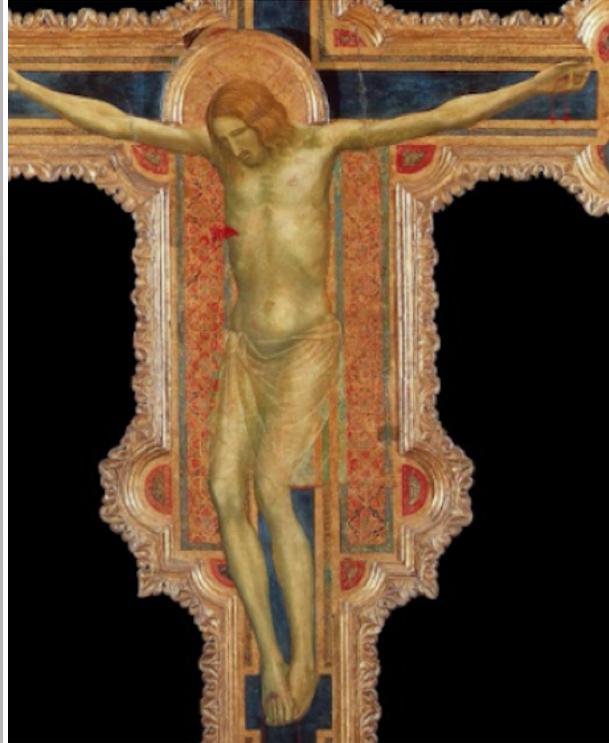


Figure 18, Giotto, Detail, *Christus Patiens*, c. 1305, Museo Civica, Padua

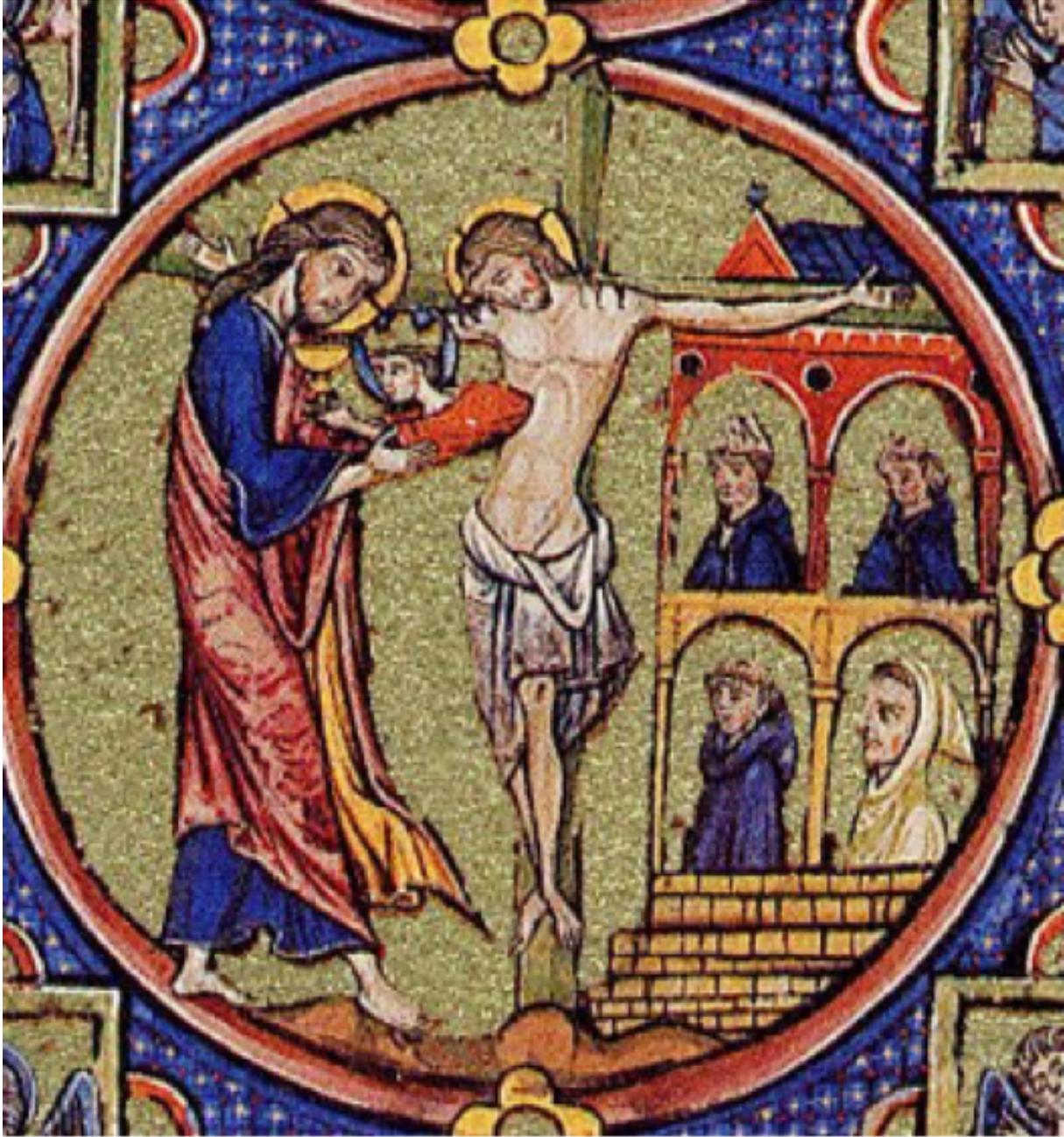


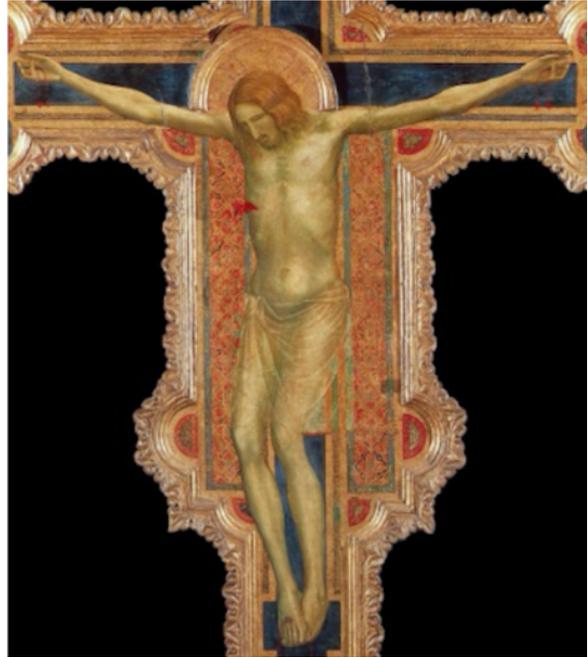
Figure 19, Artist Unknown, *Birth of Ecclesia*, c. 1220s Bible Moralisée, Codex Vindobonensis 2554, Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek



Figure 20, Artist Unknown, *Birth of Eve*, c. 1220s, Bible Moralisée, Codex Vindobonensis 2554, Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek



Figure 21, Giotto, Detail, *Nativity*, c. 1305, Arena Chapel, Padua



See Figure 18 above



Figure 22, Jean Le Noir, Attributed, *Christ's Side Wound*, before 1349, Psalter and Hours of Bonne of Luxembourg, the Cloisters Collection, Metropolitan Museum of Art



Figure 23, Jean Le Noir, Attributed, Detail, *Christ's Side Wound*, before 1349, Psalter and Hours of Bonne of Luxembourg, the Cloisters Collection, Metropolitan Museum of Art



Figure 24, Artist Unknown, *Wounds of Christ with Symbols of the Passion*, c. 1490, National Gallery of Art, Washington



Figure 25, Artist Unknown, *The Side Wound on a Cloth*, c. 1440, Cistercian Prayer Book, Baltimore, The Walters Art Museum, MSW.218, fol. 28v



Figure 26, Pietro di Niccolò da Orvieto, *Virgin and Child*, c. 1400, recto of double-sided panel, Reproduction by permission of the Syndics of the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge



Figure 27, Pietro di Niccolo da Orvieto, c. 1400, *Christ's Side Wound*, verso of double sided panel, Reproduction by permission of the Syndics of the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge



Figure 28, Fra Angelico, Detail of two of the four fictive marble panels below *Madonna of the Shadows*, c. 1438 – 1450, Convent of San Marco, Florence



Figure 29, Agnolo Gaddi, Marble Panel on wall of Virgin's Chamber, *Annunciation*, c. 1394 – 1395, Prato Cathedral, Sacra Cingolo chapel, Prato

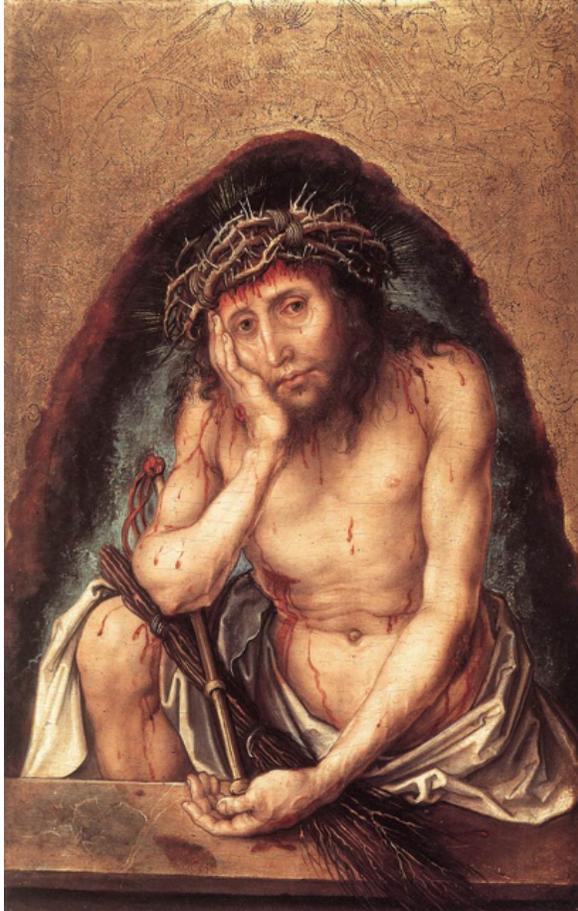


Figure 30, Albrecht Durer, *Christ as the Man of Sorrows*, recto, c. 1493, Staatliche Kunsthalle, Karlsruhe



Figure 31, Albrecht Durer, *Christ as the Man of Sorrows*, verso, c. 1493, Staatliche Kunsthalle, Karlsruhe



Figure 32 Rogier van der Weyden, *Descent from the Cross*, c. 1435, Museo del Prado, Madrid



Figure 33, Rogier van Der Weyden, *Descent from the Cross*, Detail, c. 1435, Museo del Prado, Madrid



Figure 34, Rogier van Der Weyden, *Descent From The Cross*, Detail, c. 1435 Museo del Prado, Madrid



Figure 35, Giotto, *Stigmatization of St. Francis*, c. 1325 – 1328, Bardi Chapel, Santa Croce, Florence



Figure 36, Duccio, *The Incredulity of St. Thomas*, c. 1308 – 1311,
Museo dell' Opera del Duomo, Siena



Figure 37, Giotto, *Lamentation and Funeral Rites of St. Francis*, c. 1325 – 1328 Bardi Chapel, Santa Croce, Florence



Figure 38, Follower of Jean Pichore, *Salome with Severed Hands*, c. 1490 – 1500, Book of Hours, France, MS M.7 for 14r, Morgan Library, New York



Figure 39, Artist Unknown, *God the Creator*, c. 1200s, Bible Moralisee, *Osterreichische Nationalbibliothek*, MS Cod 2554, f.1



Figure 40, Artist Unknown, *God the Creator*, c. 1220s, *Bible Moralisée*, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, MS Cod. 2534, f.1v



Figure 41, Giotto, *Virgin Enthroned, Ognissanti Madonna*, c. 1306 – 1310, Uffizi, Florence



Figure 42, Detail of Figure 40, *God the Creator*



Figure 43, *Ebstorf Mappa Mundi*, c. 1200s, Kloster Ebstorf, Germany, destroyed 1943



Figure 44, Isidore of Seville, T and O Mappa Mundi from *Etymologiae*, written in 623, first printed in 1472 at Augsburg



Figure 45, Detail of Figure 39, *God the Creator*, c. 1200s, *Bible Moralisée*, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, MS Cod 2554, f.1

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