SARAH SCHÄFER-ALTHAUS

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Female Sanctity, Gender Hybridity and the Body in Women's Hagiography

Universitätsverlag
WINTER
Heidelberg

REGENSBURGER BEITRÄGE
ZUR GENDER-FORSCHUNG
Band 8

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Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek
Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation
in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie;
detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet
über *http://dnb.d-nb.de* abrufbar.

Zugl.: Paderborn: Univ., Diss., 2015

ISBN 978-3-8253-6680-3

Imprimé en Allemagne · Printed in Germany
Umschlaggestaltung: Klaus Brecht GmbH, Heidelberg, Umschlagbild: fotolia
Druck: Memminger MedienCentrum, 87700 Memmingen

Gedruckt auf umweltfreundlichem, chlorfrei gebleichtem
und alterungsbeständigem Papier

Den Verlag erreichen Sie im Internet unter:
www.winter-verlag.de

Acknowledgements

During the time of writing, revising and publishing this book, I have benefited greatly from a number of scholars, colleagues and mentors who helped and supported me along the way.

First of all, I owe a sincere and earnest debt of gratitude to my supervisor Prof. Dr. Merle Tönnies, whose continual and unconditional support, empowerment and encouragement as well as her personal and professional guidance from the early stages of my research has helped me to become an independent scholar. I furthermore want to thank my second supervisor, Prof. Dr. Christoph Ehland, for his critical and in-depth assessment of my work, as well as the other members of the defense committee, Prof. Dr. Christoph Ribbat and Dr. Sara Strauß, for their time and commitment. I also owe a particular debt to Prof. em. Dr. Rolf Breuer, who, with his excellence in teaching, introduced me to the field of medieval studies during my time as a graduate student at the University of Paderborn, and to Prof. Dr. Susan Kim, whose class on medieval gender studies during my time at Illinois State University (2009) has greatly influenced my own work.

Over the years I have been generously provided with fellowships and research grants from the University of Paderborn, for which I am particularly thankful as without them this study could have been neither started nor completed. In this respect I am truly grateful to the university for a six-month fellowship ("Förderlinie I", 2010-2011) and for a three-year full-time doctoral fellowship ("Promotionsstipendium im Bereich der Genderforschung", 2011-2014) as well as to the Fakultät für Kulturwissenschaften for two conference travel grants (2013).

I have in addition profited immensely from the many opportunities I have had to discuss some of the ideas of this study at various conferences – especially at the annual Gender and Medieval Studies Conference held by the Gender and Medieval Studies Group (2012-2014), the International Congress on Medieval Studies at Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo (2013) and the International Medieval Congress at the University of Leeds (2013, 2014). At this point I also want to thank the lively and encouraging online communities of the Society for Medieval Feminist Scholarship and the Hagiography Society for discussing difficult matters and thus helping me to progress in the final stages of this project.

Furthermore, I wholeheartedly want to thank both editors of this series, Prof. Dr. Anne-Julia Zwierlein and Prof. Dr. Rainer Emig, for their interest in my work and the possibility to publish my dissertation within the realms of the *Regensburger Beiträge zur Gender-Forschung*, as well as Dr. Andreas Barth, Ralf Stemper and the entire team at Winter for the close collaboration in the publication process.

My sincere thanks goes to the group of colleagues and friends who have constantly supported my project and encouraged me to pursue the path I have chosen. They include Prof. Dr. Greta Olson, my inspiring mentor and patient listener; Dr. Mareike Tüllmann

and Dr. Sara Strauß, whose thoughtful suggestions and corrections were valuable in different stages of this project; and my dear friends and colleagues Mirja Gehring, Anna Krumm and Dr. Antonio Roselli for their late-night talks, the uncountable coffee dates and their undemanding support when I needed it the most. I also want to express my sincere appreciation to Tim Feeney, whose careful reading and impressive, magical editing skills were extremely helpful and improved the final version of this book. Needless to say, all remaining errors are entirely my own responsibility.

Above all, no words can express the gratitude I owe to my husband, Daniel, for his strong encouragement, his unflagging interest, his continual support and his loving care over the last years. Without him, his love and his unconditional belief in me and my work, this book would not have been completed. To him this book is dedicated.

Introduction

> Warum müssen wir uns mit dem Körper des Menschen im Mittelalter beschäftigen? Weil er zu den größten Forschungslücken in der Geschichtsschreibung gehört.
>
> Jacques Le Goff and Nicolas Truong[1]

In their study *Die Geschichte des Körpers im Mittelalter* (2007), the French historian and sociologist Jacques Le Goff and journalist Nicolas Truong illustrate that the human body, with its various limbs, fluids and functions, was a highly controversial and much debated topic in the Middle Ages, a time period traditionally located between the sixth and late fifteenth centuries. The body constantly had to negotiate its place between glorification and crucifixion, between superiority and subordination. It was seen as a symbol of constant decay and mirrored human imperfections, but at the same time, the body was worshipped and praised, and many social, cultural and gender-related implications were closely connected to it (Le Goff and Truong 14). The body was an all-encompassing metaphor, describing society and institutions, symbolising unity and conflict, order and disorder, and most of all, organic life in all of its facets (14). Unfortunately, among cultural historians the body belonged for a long time to nature rather than culture, an assumption which led to the fact that no other aspect of medieval cultural history has been more neglected within scholarship than the body, leaving a research gap in chronicles of cultural history and in the modern understanding of the past (18, 23). However, as the medieval era has shaped the present like no other time period preceding it – it is a period seen as "crucial in the development of Western attitudes" (Bullough and Brundage, *Sexual Practices* xi; see also Le Goff and Truong 33), a period whose mentalities, customs and attitudes affect humanity up to the present day – the question arises of whether the body does not have a history of its own. Is the body not able to shape culture to various degrees – economically, socially and mentally, but also sexually, and in relation to gender (Le Goff and Truong 18)?

Therefore, the initial research interest of this thesis lies in the question of how women, femininity and in particular the female body were constructed and treated in medieval literature and culture. In this respect, female saints' legends prove to be the most promising source for further investigations of early attitudes and phenomena concerning medieval femininity and femaleness for a variety of reasons. First, saints

[1] Unless specifically noted, all translations are the author's. Trans.: "Why do we have to deal with the body of the Middle Ages? Because it belongs to the greatest research gaps in history". Jacques Le Goff and Nicolas Truong, *Die Geschichte des Körpers im Mittelalter* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2007), p. 9. Originally published as Jacques Le Goff and Nicolas Truong, *Une Histoire du Corps au Moyen Âge* (Paris: Levi, 2003). All direct citations within this study are taken from the German edition (2007) and translated.

were considered to be the "superheroes and the celebrities" (Salih, *Companion* 1) of the Middle Ages, as Sarah Salih writes in her introduction to *A Companion to Middle English Hagiography* (2003):

> They pervaded the landscape: their names, images and narratives were attached to buildings, geographical features, parishes, guilds and towns. Saint-cult was multimedia and interactive. Every church displayed paintings and sculptures of the saints; their feast days were celebrated with liturgies, readings, plays, processions and feasts. (1)

Saints' legends were the "fabric of everyday life" (3), and hagiography, the study of saints' lives, was identified as the most frequently read genre of medieval times. Hagiographies such as the *Legenda Aurea* by Jacobus de Voragine (1260) would nowadays be considered influential bestsellers, and the *Legenda* in particular is claimed to be the second-most read book during the European Middle Ages (Long 54). Even though hagiographical narratives often lack historical authenticity,[2] the numerous *passiones* and *vitae* can nevertheless function as representations of culture, common knowledge and conventional motifs and as such arguably fit into "a surprisingly wide array of purposes, intended audiences, notions of decorum and kinds of religious and socio-political teachings" (Reames, "Artistry" 178).

Second, saints' legends are body-centred texts. Saints and their bodies are interconnected and interdependent, and the length of the individual *life*,[3] especially in descriptions of martyrdoms, increases with the number of sentences focusing on the body and its torture. As Stavroula Constantinou remarks, "the longer the body remains unharmed [by tortures], the larger the tormenter's desire to harm it" (40). Consequently, the longer a narrative focuses on the body as a stylistic device and offers detailed descriptions of various, usually negative treatments of the body and individual body parts, the longer the body functions as a metaphor and the more successful the legends were in their public reception and reproduction.

Third, next to the popularity of saints' legends in general, female saints' legends in particular offer unique insights into this body-focused genre, with its indoctrinated, almost exclusively male[4] descriptions of women's bodies. On the one hand the function of masculinity, which commonly appears in the form of male authorship of and male heathen torturers in the legends, allows a rather traditional, male-dominated reading of the *vitae*, and even the "selection of saints in Legendaries", as Robert Bartlett points out, has always been "masculine and archaic" (555). On the other hand, however, the majority of women saints presented in this study challenge the traditional gender hierarchy and thus question not only traditional presumptions about women, but also the narrowness of the common binaries: sex and gender. Legends featuring female cross-

[2] For a discussion of the genre of hagiography, its author-text relation and its influence in the medieval era, see chapter 1.

[3] "Life" has two meanings here: the length of the saint's *vita* and the length of her biological life.

[4] For example, Jacobus de Voragine, Alban Butler, or Ælfric. As Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg notes, with the exception of two *vitae*, all of the lives of women saints with identifiable authors in the *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina* are written by men. Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, *Forgetful of Their Sex: Female Sanctity and Society, ca. 500-1100* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1998), p. 31.

dressers, bearded women or uncommonly outspoken female protagonists are thereby examples of "a discourse which frames [a] construction of gender which may not be entirely familiar to the modern reader" as it describes "individuals [who] could move on occasion between genders or adopt the attributes of another gender" (Riches and Salih 4). This possibility to transcend their female sex and the repeatedly displayed permeability of sex and gender roles set female saints "apart from ordinary women and singled them out as candidates for sainthood" (Schulenburg 1). However, as saints' legends in general and women saints' in particular were intended to serve as role models, as sources of inspiration and imitation,

> this heroic and strong, or "virile" behaviour which was encouraged in certain cultural contexts proved to be problematic in others. Seen as a serious threat to male order or authority, actions which had once won the approbation of the Church and society came to be perceived as extreme and dangerous. Instead of attracting praise and elevation to sainthood, the transcendence of the limitation and temptations of female sexuality and their proper gender roles […] brought suspicion and contempt to women. Viewed as exercising profoundly threatening, transgressive, or disturbing roles, such women were seen as the dangerous "other"; they needed to be contained, marginalized, or punished. (2)

Hence, at "a time when there is far less certainty regarding spiritual orthodoxy and sexual normality than ever before", female saints' legends "challenge us to ask new questions" and to investigate these "controversial or unusual historical artifacts from new perspectives" (Friesen 7).

Therefore, the aim of this study is the exploration of these complex historical, cultural, sociological and gendered constructions of the medieval female body in popular female saints' legends. By focusing on frequently recurring body parts in women's hagiography, such as the breast, hair(styles) and the tripartite construction of mouth, teeth and tongue, this study will critically reflect on the gendered treatment of these body parts against the ideological and religious background of this masculine genre and the role of women at that time. It will show that the treatment of specific body parts often mirrors male anxieties about the female body and women in general and frequently highlights sexual and even sadistic fantasies. Furthermore, even though female saints were supposed to be consistently orthodox in ideological, instructive terms, many of them are depicted as what Judith Butler has called "incoherently sexed" ("Sexual Inversions" 67), as transvestites or eunuchs, and thus as (bodily) gender hybrids, creating a "screen for potentially dangerous ideas" (Reames, "Artistry" 199) and turning them into a "serious threat to male order or authority" (Schulenburg 2).

In order to examine these different aspects, the legends will be approached with the help of context and content-oriented methodologies. Next to a comparative, intertextual and close reading of the narratives, this study will embed the *vitae* in their literary and cultural history, treating the legends as a reflection and product of their social reality. In this way, the thesis will combine the analytical methods and approaches of gender studies with those of cultural studies in a broader sense and provide additional interdisciplinary insights into sociology, body theory, theology, art history, medicine and other fields relevant for the ensuing interpretation of the literary works in general and the female body in particular.

In the process of selecting female saints' legends for further analyses, the first stages of research commenced with a census of European women saints in popular reference works for hagiographers, such as the previously mentioned *Legenda Aurea*, also known as the *Golden Legend* (1260), by Jacobus de Voragine, translated by William Granger Ryan (2 vols., 1993, rpt. 1995);[5] Alban Butler's *Lives of the Saints* (1756-1759), edited, revised and supplemented by Herbert Thurston and Donald Attwater (4 vols., 1956);[6] David Hugh Farmer's *Oxford Dictionary of Saints* (1982; 5th ed., 2004); Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*, edited and translated by Walter Skeat (2 vols., 1881-1900); and Leslie A. Donovan's *Women Saints' Lives in Old English Prose* (1999).

Of the collective numbers, approximately eighty female saints' legends, whether historically authentic or completely fictional, could be singled out in which the body, its description and commonly also its destruction played a significant role for the individual saint's life, her martyrdom and her endeavour to achieve sainthood in medieval times through today – the latter criterion being applied in order to ensure that the saint and the focus on certain body parts are linked with apodictic certainty and can be considered standard elements in the respective traditions.

In selecting saints, this study was "more inclusive than exclusive in this exercise" (Schulenburg 11) and purposely expanded its research to the large number of marvellous individuals whose lives are not historically authentic, but rather completely fictional or improbable. "After the triumph of Christianity in the fourth century", as Bartlett asserts, "the genre of martyrdom accounts took wing, and purely legendary and fantastical Passions of the martyrs were composed, even if, on occasion, the martyr who was the subject was indeed a real historical person" (505). Consequently, as the discussion of the genre of hagiography in the first chapter will show, saints' legends are often constructed, adapted and modified by their authors and compilers to suit the tastes of employers and sponsors and to represent their ideological beliefs. As Bartlett notes, "hagiographers often wrote in their prefaces that the work had been imposed on them by the order of superiors" (513) and in many "occasions it is clear that hagiographic writers had been formally missioned to undertake their work by members of another

[5] However, it is the edition by Theodor Graesse from the nineteenth century which is seen as the standard Latin version on which most of the twentieth-century translations, such as Ryan's, are based. See Jacobi a Voragine [Jacobus de Voragine], *Legenda aurea vulgo Historia lombardica dicta*, ed. Theodor Graesse, 2nd ed. (Lipsiae [Leipzig]: Librariae Arnoldianae, 1850; rpt. Osnabrück: Zeller, 1969). As the majority of the saints' legends analysed in this study appear in the *Legenda Aurea*, de Voragine's work will be used as the predominant primary source. The following study will take the translation of Graesse's edition by William Granger Ryan as the basis for further analysis; see Jacobus De Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, 2 vols., ed. and trans. William Granger Ryan (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1995), from now on referenced as "de Voragine" unless otherwise noted. Direct quotes are furthermore supplemented with the Latin taken from Graesse's edition of the *Legenda Aurea*, from now on referred to as "Graesse". Both texts can be found under de Voragine in the bibliography. Other editions of the *Legenda Aurea* such as the *Gilte Legende* or William Caxton's translation are not considered herein, as de Voragine's version is widely acknowledged as the standard text for medieval saints' lives. Furthermore, the entries in both the *Gilte Legende* and Caxton's work do not include substantial modifications of the texts which would alter the arguments made in this study.

[6] All references to Butler's *Lives of the Saints* are to the edition by Thurston and Attwater (1956).

community" (514). This explains why especially in the cases of saints whose lives are entirely constructed by authors, with sometimes only the name of the saint being historically accurate, long descriptions of bodily tortures are featured, which strongly reflect patriarchal attitudes towards the female body. Hence, it is reasonable to argue that the body parts mentioned are placed within the narratives on purpose to manifest theological ideology on the one hand and gender ideology on the other.

The first census showed that within female saints' legends the focus is arguably set on the upper female body, though sometimes implying analogies to the lower, unmentionable, mysteriously private female parts.[7] Whereas some body parts, such as the breast, hair and hairstyles in various lengths, and the gorge and its components (teeth, tongue, throat) are frequently featured in women's hagiography, others, such as arms or legs, are barely mentioned and still others, such as the genital area, are not mentioned at all. In addition, an unexpectedly high number of legends describe women who either cross-dress and disguise themselves as men and as such neglect their assigned sex and expected gender behaviour or who transcend their female sex in other ways and move into the territory of men by, for example, shortening their hair or miraculously growing a beard. Within the scope of this study, the focus will consequently be set on these frequently recurring body parts – the breast, hair(styles) and the mouth and its components (teeth and tongue) – the latter being grouped together because of their closely related symbolism and cultural history.[8]

As a result, the finalized corpus of saints' *vitae* selected for this study includes about twenty medieval women saints. Among them are the popular European virgin martyrs Agatha, Agnes, Lucy and Cecilia, whose names were "familiar throughout the medieval West" as they were "mentioned in every Latin Mass" (Bartlett 114) and whose *vitae* have long and diverse narrative traditions. Other saints studied in detail include repentant prostitutes such as the saints Mary Magdalene and Mary of Egypt, admired transvestite saints such as Eugenia and Euphrosyne, controversial and obscure women saints such as the bearded Saint Wilgefortis and late-medieval women mystics such as Clare of Assisi and Catherine of Siena.[9]

Regarding the primary sources used for textual references, the *Legenda Aurea* is utilized throughout because of its inclusion of the majority of saints selected for this

[7] For example, see chapter 4 about the analogies between mouth and vagina, teeth and hymen, tongue and clitoris.

[8] As particular hagiographical legends describing the martyrdom of a saint commonly include more than one body part, a general claim that one body part is exclusively featured per saint cannot be made, even though this is the case in some *vitae*, such as in the legend of Saint Agatha (breasts) or Saint Wilgefortis (beard). For many saints more than one body part is affected, which resulted in their significance for several chapters and interpretations in this study. For example, Saint Christina has her head shaved, her breasts pierced with hot tongs and her tongue cut out. Furthermore, in this study a saint was taken into consideration for further analysis only if either more than one version of her legend included the description of a specific body part and her legend still includes these descriptions in modern compilations of saints' lives, or if her life is inseparably connected to a specific bodily feature (for example, Saint Agatha and the breast; see chapter 2).

[9] Another saint who is discussed extensively is Saint Christina. The remaining saints and their *vitae* appear in supporting capacity of the arguments made.

study. In addition, other major collections of primary sources for the study of medieval saints, such as the *Acta Sanctorum* or the *Patrologia Latina*, were consulted, as well as a number of individually edited or translated texts, such as the *Damasi Epigrammata* (Saint Agnes) or the *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great (Saint Galla). The *Acta* was particularly helpful in providing medieval textual evidence and in-depth detail for the three late-medieval saints Wilgefortis (dates unknown), Clare (1194-1253) and Catherine of Siena (1347 (1333?)-1380), whose literary traditions originate in the fourteenth to early sixteenth century. As "saint's Lives did not remain static but changed with ecclesiastical and societal perceptions and needs, scholars should study and compare, when possible, a series of subsequent Lives for the same saint" (Schulenburg 51). Therefore, earlier Latin and Old English accounts, such as Bede's *Martyrologium* or Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*, are used mainly for comparative purposes and to indicate the development of particular, significant details or influential coexisting literary traditions and alterations.[10] Even though most of the versions overlap in their representations and descriptions of saints' *vitae*, each compilation seems "to favour" some saints and to "neglect others", as Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg notes (10), yet all of them in combination provided beneficial and unique additions and perspectives to the study.[11]

At this point it has to be noted that the cults of the saints and their praise and worship are often phenomena beyond any geographical and time-specific boundaries. As Bartlett notes:

> One striking thing about the Christian cult of the saints is how adaptable and malleable it has been. It arose in the cities of the ancient Greek and Roman world but spread in its early centuries deep into the deserts of Egypt and the Middle East and then westwards to the cool, wet landscapes of Gaul and Britain, reaching the Atlantic coasts of Ireland, a country never subdued by Rome, in the fifth century. It has remained a central part of Christian worship and devotion ever since, in the monasteries of Germany and Greece, the trading towns of the Italian Renaissance, the baroque churches of Austria and Mexico, in Russia, Armenia and Georgia, in the industrial cities of modern France, and the Catholic and Orthodox congregations of North America. (637)

Thus, saints were and still are of global significance, particularly once they are officially venerated by the Catholic Church and included in the official martyrologies, such as the *Martyrologium Romanum*. Saints are "both universal and local […] they were present but also transcended time, and they were often imagined as a glorious company in

[10] The exception is the analysis of the transvestite saint Euphrosyne. Direct quotes are predominately taken from Ælfric's more popular *Natale Sancte Eufrasiæ* with the earlier Latin *Vita Sanctæ Euphrosinæ* from the *Patrologia Latina* used in supporting capacity. Unless otherwise noted, all subsequent (direct) references to Ælfric's *Lives of Saints* will be referenced as Skeat. However, the work is listed under Ælfric's name in the bibliography.

[11] An example of a minor, yet significant alteration is for example visible in the legend of Saint Agatha, a young virgin martyr who in the course of her martyrdom has her breasts torn off her body. Whereas the *Legenda Aurea* and Ælfric's *Natale Sancte Agathe* speak of one breast being detached, Bede's martyrology and Aldhelm's *Carmen de Virginitate* include the mastectomy of both breasts. For a closer analysis consult chapter 2.

heaven" (Bartlett 637) and as such they "have shaped the lives and imaginations of millions, and still do" (637). Thus, the female saints' legends analysed in the following are not specifically Anglo-Saxon, British or Italian even if they enjoyed an active cult in the respective countries or were known to Anglo-Saxon authors such as Bede or Aldhelm, medieval English authors such as Geoffrey Chaucer[12] or Italian hagiographers such as Jacobus de Voragine, as the "fame and name of a saint could be universal, spreading far beyond the revered tomb that formed the original focus of a cult" (637). Similarly, these legends cannot be claimed to be exclusively medieval. Even though most of the saints analysed in the course of this study appear in Jacobus de Voragine's *Legenda Aurea* or other medieval sources, demonstrating their circulation and popularity in the Middle Ages, most of the legends were composed earlier and are, in their origin, heroic accounts of early Christianity.[13] Consequently, the majority of the legends in question are "about women from Rome and Egypt in the early Christian period" (Frantzen 70) rather than being narratives of medieval women acting in a closely defined geographical and time-specific frame. However, these legends are nevertheless a valuable source for "examin[ing] early Christian attitudes" (70) as they "represent cultural codes" (71) towards femininity, sexuality and the female body. Saints' lives in medieval Europe are "complex registers of a culture's structure of gender relations" (71) and as such "invite us to wonder how women [in medieval times] responded to such narratives, especially since violence towards women (torture, martyrdom) is prominently featured in them" (70). Therefore, as Allen Frantzen summarizes, "Narratives change in the telling […] they never represent only the past but also represent the present in which they are retold" (70).

To further clarify the theoretical framework for the upcoming analyses and interpretations, the study will first explain the reception and popularity of saints' cults throughout the Middle Ages and will provide an introduction to the multilayered complexity of hagiography as a genre and its significant author-text relation. The second part of the first chapter will elaborate on the discourse about the human body from theoretical, historical, metaphorical, symbolic and of course religious angles. It will define the concept of the body for the further analyses and will examine the differences between human and saintly bodies. In addition, the chapter will question how femininity and femaleness were constructed and in how far the growing Christian community influenced medieval ideas about sexuality, moral codes and attitudes towards the body.

The breast, the most obvious marker of femininity, will be the focus of the second chapter. In hagiography this dominant symbol of femininity is frequently challenged, threatened and tortured, and just the fact of possessing a breast and thus of being a woman causes dangers of various degrees for an individual saint's life. As the chapter

[12] See for example Chaucer's *The Second Nun's Tale*, which deals with the legend of Saint Cecilia.

[13] Except for minor exceptions, such as the legend of Saint Wilgefortis or Saint Catherine of Siena, who did not appear until approximately the fourteenth century, most of the other female saints' legends analysed in this study are older or even premedieval in their origin and setting. The oldest to be examined is the legend of Saint Mary Magdalene, whose *vita* is set in the first century.

will show, the breast functions primarily as a locus for negation – either of the presumed roles of women in society or of theological statements. In addition, whereas Saint Agatha is brutally mastectomized, others such as Saint Eugenia disguise their femininity in masculine clothing to avoid marriage, and still others, such as Saint Christina, excrete wondrous fluids from their breast wounds, raising the question of whether the maltreatment of the female breast is supposed to prove the weakness of the female sex. In addition, the chapter will provide an excursus into the discourse of *imitatio Christi* and gender-related torture and discuss how the removal of the breast can be perceived as a form of male sexual aggressiveness.

What happens when a holy woman challenges, changes and subverts the social reality will be explored in the third chapter, which examines the symbolic significance of hair and hairstyles. Among the female saints only three types of hairstyles are emphasized: long hair, as described in the legends of Saint Mary Magdalene and Saint Agnes; short hair, as in the legends of Saint Euphrosyne and Saint Eugenia; and the bearded female, as in the legends of the saints Wilgefortis, Galla and Paula. The chapter will argue that hair in women's hagiography influences the way these saints are perceived, treated and remembered within and beyond their legends. Hair connects sinner with saint, helps to progress spiritually, and purifies and protects and is thus "attached to a complex system of gender specific interpretations" (Walter 311),[14] as the analyses will show.[15]

The fourth chapter will investigate the intersections between the historical understanding of tongues and throats in relation to the physical silencing of rhetorically advanced women on the one hand (Saints Lucy and Cecilia) and the symbolic defloration of the virgin saints on the other (Saint Christina). The analysis will demonstrate that the mouth and its tripartite components are not only treated as a "door" through which beliefs and vocation are uttered, but are set in analogy with the female genitals and transformed symbolically into a vagina. Thereby the teeth play a crucial role as they function as the only visible barrier between inner and outer body, as a symbolic "hymen", which is "deflowered" in the legend of Saint Apollonia, among others, by pulling the teeth out. Consequently in the legends of female saints, mouth and vagina, the two entrances to a woman's body, are arguably used interchangeably.

The final chapter will discuss the phenomenon of sexual and gendered hybridity among women saints. It will argue that (bodily) gender hybridity is used as a common method to indicate the transcendence of the secular, passive-feminine body, particularly among female martyrs, in order to reach a higher social acceptance within the Christian community. This transcendence is thereby achieved through the subtraction or addition of gender-signifying body parts, the saint's disguise and consequent denial of her true sex, or by employing traditionally masculine characteristics. By doing so, the female saint expands existing gender boundaries and questions the limits of the established binaries of male and female, feminine and masculine. These legends reflect the time-

[14] The text passage in the original reads, "Die jeweilige Haartracht […] ist dabei konventionell an bestimmte genderspezifische Deutungs- und Wahrnehmungskomplexe gebunden".

[15] Early versions of some ideas and arguments of chapter 3 are based on my unpublished MA thesis, "The Significance of Hair in Women's Hagiography", which was submitted to the Department of English and American Studies at the University of Paderborn in 2010.

transcending complexity of assigning a true, well-defined sex and gender in the Middle Ages and beyond. Moreover, the saints displayed permeability of sex and gender, their move into the realms of the *third*, into what Judith Butler has termed the "incoherently sexed" ("Sexual Inversions" 67), turns them into a threat for the social environment which has to be removed to restore order.

Scholarship – Research to Date on Female Sanctity and the Body

For a long time, hagiography "was […] dismissed as too crude and too stereotypical to be truly artistic or historically informative" (20) and thus was of no or only little academic interest, as Salih writes in her introduction to *A Companion to Middle English Hagiography*. Consequently, despite the saints' overall popularity, "the genre of the saint's *Life* remains little studied" (Salih, *Companion* back cover). Fortunately, in the last thirty years, scholars have "found it necessary to rehabilitate hagiography" (2), and a "great resurgence of interest" (Schulenburg 13) in the genre, its protagonists and its cultural history has occurred in academia. As Bartlett notes, "In recent generations, however, interest in hagiography has developed to a remarkable degree, with societies and journals dedicated to it and a general recognition of its importance and value as literature, as a source for social history and as a window into medieval mentalities" (504).

Much research until now has focused on reintroducing hagiography primarily into literary and academic circles, but also making it available for a wider nonscholarly audience. This led on the one hand to the production of new editions, translations and compilations of saints' legends and on the other to more general overviews of hagiography.[16] In contrast to the renewed interest in hagiography in general, in-depth studies of female sanctity and the body, of female saints from a cultural, historical, literary and of course gendered perspective,[17] and also studies focusing on the body

[16] For encyclopaedic works see, for example, David Hugh Farmer, *Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, 5th ed. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004); Alban Butler, *Butler's Lives of the Saints*, rev. Michael Walsh (New York: Harper Collins, 1991); or Robert Bartlett, *Why Can the Dead Do Such Great Things? Saints and Worshippers from the Martyrs to the Reformation* (Oxford: Princeton UP, 2013). Still in use and reprinted frequently is Hippolyte Delehaye's pioneering introductory work for hagiographers, *The Legends of Saints: An Introduction to Hagiography* (1905, rpt. 2009), in which he extensively reflects on the genre's origin, development and classification and explores its complex author-text relation. Despite its ongoing popularity, recent scholarship has criticized Delehaye's strict genre classification of hagiography and has come to a more diverse assessment of the relationship between hagiography and historiography. See for example Felice Lifshitz, "Beyond Positivism and Genre: Hagiographical Texts as Historical Narrative", *Viator* 25 (1994): 95-113; see also the discussion in chapter 1.1.1. More recent introductions to the study of saints' lives start to look beyond the mere historical and narratological sphere and provide information on key themes in hagiography, such as gender, personal identity, violence or cultic activities; for example, Sarah Salih, ed., *A Companion to Middle English Hagiography* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2006).

[17] For works dealing with female saints see Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg's influential and in-depth analysis of female sanctity in relation to aspects of everyday culture, such as family, virginity or

parts analysed in this study – breast, hair(styles), mouth, teeth and tongues – are still either relatively rare or non-existent.[18] Rather than directing academic attention to analyses of body parts, recent hagiographical scholarship frequently concentrates on the exploration of the body in sensational, sensual or sexual terms, thereby analysing, for example, *The Sex Lives of Saints* (Victoria Burrus, 2004), the relationship between *Pain, Pleasure and Punishment in Medieval Culture* (Robert Mills, *Suspended Animation*, 2005)[19] or the phenomenon of female cross-dressing saints.[20]

In addition, Peter Brown's *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (1988), James Brundage's *Law, Sex and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (1987) and Vern Bullough and James Brundage's *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality* (2000) are among the most influential general-reference works on the body in medieval society and in regard to (early) Christianity and its urge to regulate and redefine the body. Other research to date centres on historical approaches to anatomy, sex and gender, such as Thomas Laqueur's *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (1992), or has tried to grant access to

motherhood: *Forgetful of Their Sex: Female Sanctity and Society, ca. 500-1100* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1998). For more recent book-length studies see Stavroula Constantinou, *Female Corporeal Performances: Reading the Body in Byzantine Passions and Lives of Holy Women* (Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, 2005); Anke Bernau, Ruth Evans, and Sarah Salih, eds., *Medieval Virginities* (Cardiff: U of Wales P, 2005); and Paul E. Szarmach, ed., *Writing Women Saints in Anglo-Saxon England* (Toronto: Toronto UP, 2013).

[18] For the only monograph on the (religious) breast, see Margaret R. Miles, *A Complex Delight: The Secularization of the Breast 1350-1750* (Berkeley: U of California P, 2008). No book-length studies to my knowledge exist on the metaphors of mouth, teeth and tongues in hagiography. For the cultural and religious implications of the mouth see Gary D. Schmidt, *The Iconography of the Mouth of Hell* (London: Associated University Presses, 1995); and Sylvia Schroer, *Die Körpersymbolik der Bibel* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1998). In contrast to breasts and the mouth, the cultural significance of hair has received wider academic attention. For a thorough investigation of hair in cultural history, consult Wendy Cooper, *Hair: Sex, Society, Symbolism* (New York: Stein and Day, 1971). However, up to this point research on saintly hairstyles has focused on analysing one specific hairstyle in detail rather than all three styles in comparison and in relation to each other; for example, Christine Knust, "'Allen sinen lip bedecktent die loecke': Zur Symbolik der Haare in Heiligenlegenden und Heiligendarstellungen des Mittelalters", *Haare zwischen Fiktion und Realität: Interdisziplinäre Untersuchungen zur Wahrnehmung der Haare*, ed. Birgit Haas (Berlin: LIT, 2008), pp. 115-34; or Roberta Lee Milliken, *Ambiguous Locks: An Iconology of Hair in Medieval Art and Literature* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2012).

[19] Similar topics are explored in Gabriele Sorgo, *Martyrium und Pornographie* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1997); Eileen Harney, "The Sexualized and Gendered Tortures of Virgin Martyrs in Medieval English Literature" (PhD dissertation, U of Toronto, 2008); and more recently in William Burgwinkle and Cary Howie, *Sanctity and Pornography in Medieval Culture: On the Verge* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2011).

[20] For example, Thomas Honegger, *Riddles, Knights and Cross-Dressing Saints*, (Bern: Lang, 2004), in particular the article by Sandra Lowerre, "To Rise beyond Their Sex: Female Cross-Dressing Saints in Caxton's *Vitas Patrum*", pp. 55-94; or Jonathan Walker, "The Transtextuality of Transvestite Sainthood; Or, How to Make the Gendered Form Fit the Generic Function", *Exemplaria* 15 (2003): 73-110.