

Martyrdom, Motherhood, and the Aetiology of Infanticide: The Legend of Saints Quiricus and Julitta in Early Iberian Art and Literature

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ABSTRACT

The legend of Saints Quiricus and Julitta circulated in two different forms. The oldest, the *Acta Apocrypha*, offers an implausible account of martyrdom, depicting the soon-to-be-three-year-old Quiricus as a militantly loquacious evangelizer, and his mother, Julitta, as an avid and enthusiastic disciple. This is the source preferred by early Iberian artworks. Conversely, the accounts descended from a fifth-century epistle composed by Theodore of Mopsuestia depict the saints in an entirely different light. In this version Julitta becomes the centre of narrative interest while Quiricus is reimagined as a figure at a pre-linguistic stage of development. This is the source favoured by medieval Iberian prose accounts. The distinction between the two branches raises questions concerning the relationship between orthodoxy and heterodoxy as well as the specific individual qualities of art and literature. This article argues that critical positions that fail to account for the influence of differing narrative forms will reveal only a small and potentially misleading part of the fuller picture. It becomes important in view of this to adopt a more holistic and nuanced approach towards questions of interpretation, reaching across traditional disciplinary boundaries so as to gain an insight into the richness and complexity of medieval production.

KEYWORDS

St Quiricus; St Julitta; *Acta Apocrypha*; Theodore of Mopsuestia; *Legenda Aurea*; *Durro Antependium*; *Gran flos sanctorum*; hagiography; torture; martyrdom; medieval children; infanticide; Massacre of the Innocents; Rachel; Maccabean mother; grief; lamentation



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RESUMEN

La leyenda de san Quirico y santa Julita circuló en dos formas diferentes. La más antigua, la *Acta apocrifa*, ofrece un relato inverosímil del martirio, ya que describe a Quirico, que pronto cumplirá tres años, como un evangelizador militante y locuaz, y a su madre, Julita, como una discípula ávida y entusiasta. Ésta es la fuente preferida por las obras de arte ibéricas tempranas. Por el contrario, los relatos que descienden de una epístola compuesta en el siglo v por Teodoro de Mopsuestia describen a los santos de una manera completamente diferente. En esta versión, Julita se convierte en el centro de interés narrativo, mientras que Quirico se presenta como una figura en una etapa de desarrollo prelingüística. Ésta es la fuente preferida por los relatos en prosa ibéricos medievales. La distinción entre las dos ramas plantea cuestiones relativas a la relación entre la ortodoxia y la heterodoxia, así como las cualidades individuales y específicas del arte y de la literatura. Este artículo argumenta que una posición crítica que no toma en cuenta la influencia de las diferentes formas narrativas revelará sólo una parte pequeña y potencialmente falsa del panorama completo. Por lo tanto, resulta importante adoptar un enfoque más holístico y matizado hacia las cuestiones de interpretación, atravesando los límites disciplinarios tradicionales para obtener una visión de la riqueza y complejidad de la producción medieval.

PARAULES CLAU

San Quirico; santa Julita; *Acta apocrifa*; Teodoro de Mopsuestia; *Legenda aurea*; *Antependio de Durro*; *Gran flos sanctorum*; hagiografía; tortura; martirio; niños medievales; infanticidio; matanza de los inocentes; Raquel; madre Macabea; dolor; lamentación

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1 Literary and Visual Evolution

The oldest extant version of the legend of Saints Quiricus and Julitta –the aptly entitled *Acta Apocrypha*– offers one of the most preposterous and implausible accounts of martyrdom to have been produced during the early Christian period.¹ The text relates how Julitta, having travelled from Iconium to Tarsus so as to avoid persecution, is arrested and brought before Alexander, the Roman Prefect, who orders her to offer sacrifice. When she refuses, Alexander threatens her with death, and so Julitta affirms that if he is determined to proceed, he should seek out her soon-to-be-three-year-old son, Quiricus, whose example they should emulate. The narrative thereafter describes how the youngster, drawing on abilities far beyond his years, ridicules the Prefect's faith by deploying a gamut of sophisticated theological arguments. As a punishment for Quiricus's insolence, Alexander orders him to be whipped before having mustard and vinegar rubbed onto his nose and nails hammered into his flesh. He is then thrown into prison, where, rather than suffer, he promptly vanquishes the Devil in debate. When the trial resumes, Quiricus summons an angel to smash Alexander's idols and then surprises his coppersmiths by furnishing them with a design for a bespoke instrument of torture. Over the next forty days, the coppersmiths put Quiricus's plan into effect while the youngster, working in tandem with his mother, converts four hundred and forty-four prisoners to Christianity. When the device has been completed, Alexander resolves to have Quiricus and his mother flayed alive and then burned, but on realizing that he will be unable to do so, he opts instead to have the converted prisoners decapitated. He then secures Quiricus to the bespoke instrument so that he can be pierced by nails and thereafter strangled and sawn into pieces along with his mother. As a result of the intervention of the Holy Spirit, the dismembered martyrs are promptly resurrected and encouraged to confront their assailant, who, astonished by their restoration to life, demands proof of their miraculous power. Quiricus then transforms Alexander's shoes into animals, which, on being slaughtered, fill eleven thousand baskets with meat. The Prefect, in response, commands his henchmen to sever the youngster's tongue and to force the martyrs to defile themselves by consuming food from the sacrificial altars. He then has Quiricus boiled in a cauldron into which the youngster calmly invites his mother, who, by this point, is teetering on the brink of apostasy. Quiricus thereafter arrogates the power of the priestly elite by baptizing her in its waters before burning and then healing Alexander, who, frustrated by the lack of progress, condemns the martyrs to be decapitated and dismembered. After a description of the scattering and subsequent gathering of their remains, the text concludes with a theophanic vision in which Quiricus speaks directly to Christ as he and his mother are welcomed into heaven by a retinue of angels.

In view of the outlandish and largely implausible nature of the *Acta Apocrypha*, it is unsurprising that should it have been viewed with disdain by early Church authorities. In the early fifth century,

1. Quiricus and Julitta are reputed to have been martyred at the height of the Diocletian persecutions, most likely in 304. Their feast is celebrated on 16 June in the West but 15 July in the East. The only printed edition of the text is the one produced by Daniel Papebroch (1701: 28–34) for the *Acta sanctorum* (BHL 1802). For the origin and evolution of the legend, see Stoks (1910), Greßmann (1921), Farmer (1997: 124–25), Hernando Sebastián (1998), Black (2007: 15), Palumbo (2008), Morse (2013: 187–88), Pisani (2013), Pisani (2015: 169), and Childs (2021). Translations from the Latin, unless otherwise stated, are my own.

Pope Zosimus (†418), concerned about the dissemination of the cult, dispatched a letter to Theodore of Mopsuestia (†428), bishop of the region of Anatolia in which the martyrdom is reputed to have taken place, imploring him to forward a more reliable account. In response, Theodore composed an epistle in which he censures the views of the ignorant, the unenlightened, and the heretical before affirming that after a protracted search, he was able to locate a version of the martyrdom that had been carefully preserved in the oral traditions of the Lycaonian aristocracy (Black 2007: 14; Pisani 2015: 163; Childs 2021: 104-05). In this second, significantly more streamlined account, Julitta flees from Iconium to Tarsus, where she is detained by Alexander, the Roman Prefect, who again asks her to perform sacrifice. When on this occasion she refuses, the Prefect has her whipped without mercy, which leads Quiricus, who is cradled in his arms, to kick his sides and scratch his face with his fingernails. Infuriated by the insult, the Prefect wrenches the infant from his arms and, having grasped him by the leg, dashes his brains out against the tribunal steps. Delighted at the outcome, Julitta gives thanks and praise to God for rewarding Quiricus with the crown of martyrdom, and is then coated in boiling pitch and decapitated. The text concludes with a description of the fate of the bodies of the martyrs, which are initially cast out of the city before being rescued by a brace of maidservants who inter them in a nearby location.

In the years following the production of Theodore's epistle, attacks on the status of the *Acta Apocrypha* became more fervent in tone and intensity. In the late fifth-century *Decretum Gelasianum de Libris Recipiendis et Non Recipiendis* (iv.4), the text is condemned in the list of apocryphal lives as well as in the preceding narrative, where it is censured along with the legend of St George.² A comparably acerbic tone is adopted by the *Constitutiones ecclesiasticae*, commonly ascribed to Nicephorus of Constantinople (†828), which comments on the status of texts composed by enemies of the faith so as to present the saints in a ludicrous light and thereby lead the gullible masses astray (Pitra 1858: 391; Kälviäinen 2019: 112-13; Childs 2021: 6, 39). As the result of such stringent criticism, the *Acta Apocrypha* barely circulated in the West. No Greek versions have been found, while only one Latin account, reproduced from a now lost manuscript from a monastery in Westphalia, has ever been published.³ In its place, texts such as the eleventh-century *Acta Graeca sincera*, which differs little in tone and substance from the tenor of Theodore's epistle, promoted a more streamlined and doctrinally licit interpretation of events, approaching the encounter with the Prefect in a more sober, credible, and realistic manner (van Hooff 1882: 192-93; Pisani 2015: 164, 177; Childs 2021: 10). The most obvious testament to its success is the inclusion of a related version in Jacobus de Voragine's thirteenth-century *Legenda Aurea*, the most widely disseminated of all of the great medieval hagiographic compendia (Maggioni 1998, 1: 532-33).

Yet despite the attempt to suppress the *Acta Apocrypha*, it is striking that the cult of Quiricus and Julitta was by no means confined, particularly at the level of popular devotion, to the doctrinally sanitized version of events advocated by Theodore and his successors. An important early impetus

2. "Sed ideo secundum antiquam consuetudinem singulari cautela in sancta Romana ecclesia non leguntur, quia et eorum qui conscripsere nomina penitus ignorantur et ab infidelibus et idiotis superflua aut minus apta quam rei ordo fuerit esse puntantur; sicut cuiusdam Cyrici et Iulittae, sicut Georgii aliorumque eiusmodi passiones quae ab hereticis perhibentur compositae" ["But for this reason, according to ancient custom, they are not read in the holy Roman Church with special caution, because even the names of those who wrote them are entirely unknown, and are thought to have been superfluous and unlearned by the unbelievers, or unfit for the order of things; such as the passions of a certain Quiricus and Julitta, as of George and others of the same kind as the passions which are said to have been composed by the heretics"] (Dobschütz 1912: 3-13). See also Black (2007: 15), Morse (2013: 188), Pisani (2015: 163), and Childs (2021: 6).

3. "Ex MS. Monasterii Bodecensis in Westphalia" (Papebroch 1701: 28-34). See also Husselman (1965: 80) and Childs (2021: 10).

was provided by Constantine (†327), first Christian Emperor of Rome, who honoured the relics of the saints by constructing a monastery near Constantinople and a church near Jerusalem. Around a century later, St Amator (†418) is reputed to have translated Quiricus's relics to Auxerre on his return from Antioch, which led to an explosion of popularity in the West, notably in Gaul, Italia, and Hispania, where the saints were celebrated in the names of churches and villages. Amongst the most notable Iberian examples are dedications in Burgos, Durro, Muntanyola, Pedret, Safaja, Segovia, Valladolid, and Vallès. An additional stimulus to devotion was provided by the Holy Roman Emperor, Charlemagne (†814), who, having dreamed of the infant Quiricus riding a wild boar, resolved to order the construction of Nevers Cathedral in his honour (Réau 1958-59; Black 2007: 15; Childs 2021: 7-8). The ongoing popularity of the saints is evidenced equally by the fact that they are invoked not just against perils such as fevers, fiends, battles, inclement weather, and for the protection of women in travail, but rather more ominously, in their capacity as patrons of children and sawmills, details that suggest a deep-seated and durable connection to the *Acta Apocrypha*. Worth bearing in mind, however, is that since Quiricus is often confused with Cyricus or Cyriacus, the name borne by several other popular saints, precise identification is not always possible.⁴

As far as the Iberian dissemination of the legend is concerned, an inscription dating from 668 in the Hermitage of the Holy Martyrs in Medina Sidonia affirms that Quiricus's relics are housed there (rather than in Auxerre) along with those of Sts Stephen, Julian, Felix, Justus, Pastor, Fructuosus, Augurius, Eulogius, Asciclus, Romanus, Martin, and Zoilus (Handley 2003: 149; Black 2007: 14). The names of mother and child are recorded thereafter in Mozarabic calendars, while Quiricus has commonly been venerated in locations such as the Monastery of Santo Domingo de Silos (and presumably elsewhere) through the recitation of the *Magna est gloria* mass (García 1966: 214, 450; Palumbo 2008: 23). Two seventh-century Hispano-Latin hymns – “Adest miranda passio” and “Adest dies, quod passus est” – laud Quiricus's sacrifice as a martyr (Castro 2010: 398-400; Childs 2021: 119-20; Szada 2021). Yet it is noticeable in each instance that, rather than adhere to the theologically acceptable version advocated by Theodore and his followers, they focus instead on the young saint's heroic resistance to torture, as discussed in the *Acta Apocrypha*. Conversely, in later vernacular anthologies such as the fifteenth-century *Gran flos sanctorum* (see Appendix), which was derived in part from Voragine's *Legenda Aurea*, the focus is inverted, with a version of the sanitized branch of the legend favoured over its doctrinally unpalatable antecedent.⁵ In place of a loquacious infant, capable of vanquishing his adversaries with the force of his proselytizing rhetoric, Quiricus becomes a largely silent and passive presence. The role of the miraculous is all but eliminated, while the gamut of torments to which the boy is subjected is distilled into a single, spontaneous fit of pique in which Alexander throws him from his lap and dashes his brains out against the tribunal steps. The focus of narrative attention falls thus on Julitta, who is whipped for refusing to offer sacrifice and then progressively flayed alive, coated in pitch, and beheaded. In contrast, therefore, to earlier works, which preserve traces of the *Acta Apocrypha*, the medieval literary tradition is conditioned exclusively by the later, orthodox branch of the legend.

Yet in relation to Iberian artworks, the exact opposite is true. The *Durro Antependium*, dating from the first quarter of the twelfth century, offers visual interpretations of four narrative scenes from the *Acta Apocrypha*, depicting Quiricus tortured by nails, sawn in two by a misery whip (or

4. For the legend of St Cyriacus in the *Gran flos sanctorum*, see Biblioteca Nacional de España, MS 12689, fols 13^{vb}-14^{vb}.

5. Two parallel examples, both preserving the same version of events, are the Catalan *Vides de sants rosselloneses* (Maneikis Kniatzezh-Neugaard 1977, 3: 17-19) and the Castilian *Leyenda de los santos* (Baños-Uría 2000: 169-70).

two-handed saw), boiled in a cauldron along with his mother, and at last, lacerated by swords.⁶ A more extensive six-part sequence is offered by Pere Garcia de Benavarri († c.1485) in the *Retaule de sant Quirze i santa Julita* (Barcelona, Museu Diocesà, inv. 19), where Quiricus is ordered to offer sacrifice, whipped for refusing to do so, and then confined to prison where he preaches to and then converts his fellow convicts. He is then sawn in two, boiled along with his mother, and finally decapitated (Post 1938, I: 174, 198–206, fig. 49; Gudiol-Alcolea i Blanch 1986: 132, 272). A third example, produced for the Església de sant Quirze d'Arbúcies in Catalonia, is the fifteenth-century *Retaule de sant Quirze i santa Julita* (Barcelona, Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, inv. 015785-CJT), which depicts the saints being sawn in two, secured to the coppersmith's bespoke instrument of torture, and then decapitated, events that again follow the sequential ordering of the *Acta Apocrypha*. The major exception is the top left-hand panel, which, by figuring Quiricus as an unwilling witness to his mother's whipping, demonstrates that the two branches of the legend must have at some point been partially conflated (Post 1938, I: 347–50, fig. 119; Gudiol-Alcolea i Blanch 1986: 198, 449). Although later examples –notably the sixteenth-century altarpiece from the Iglesia de la Asunción in Villamelendro de Valdavia– can be related in part to the sequence championed by Theodore and his followers, it is clear that, in contrast to the various medieval literary testimonies, the overwhelming majority of Iberian artworks favour the older, theologically discredited branch of the legend (Childs 2021: 37–38, 138).

It becomes crucial accordingly to consider the distinction between art and literature and the differing ways in which they engage with their respective audiences. Medieval Iberian artworks, derived almost exclusively from the *Acta Apocrypha*, transmit a version of the legend that has been widely censured and repudiated, while their literary equivalents, descended from Theodore's epistle, circulate a narrative account that attempted –but ultimately failed– to replace and thereby suppress its doctrinally problematic antecedent. Far from an accidental quirk of transmission, the distinction between the two suggests that the dissemination of the legend became subject to a process of selection and design. Artists and their patrons, finding much to admire in the earlier narrative, ignored the later, theologically sanitized versions so as to regale their audiences with graphic representations of torture and bodily mutilation. Conversely, the compilers of hagiographic anthologies, who showed little hesitation elsewhere in replacing readings with accounts that they regarded as being more appealing or appropriate, demonstrated no interest whatsoever in embracing a text that could potentially have been regarded as heretical.⁷ The nature of this disparity makes it important to reflect on the distinctive individual qualities of art and literature, and to understand the process of narrative elaboration in relation to the broader socio-cultural contexts in which individual compositions were produced. While critics have tended to focus on the first part of this equation, reflecting in detail on the literary excesses of the *Acta Apocrypha*, they have so far neglected to comment on its thematic and conceptual appeal or the concomitant visual unsuitability of the versions derived from Theodore's epistle. The purpose of this discussion, therefore, will be to consider the relationship between the two branches of the legend, raising implications not just for an understanding of the unique and distinctive status of the cult of Quiricus and Julitta, but of the roles of art and literature in the elaboration of hagiographic narrative more broadly.

6. Barcelona, Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, inv. 015809–000. See Cook (1929), Post (1930: 236–38), Sureda (1981: 242–43, 332–32, no. 73), Schuler (1993: 325), Black (2007), Palumbo (2008), and Childs (2021: 37).

7. Three notable examples of replacement are the treatments of Agnes, Mary of Egypt, and Paul of Thebes, which were reworked respectively from the accounts of Pseudo-Ambrose (Beresford 2007), Paul the Deacon (Thompson-Walsh 1977), and Jerome (Beresford 2010b).

2 The *Durro Antependium* and Related Artworks



Fig. 1. The *Durro Antependium*, early twelfth century. Barcelona, Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya. Photo by Andrew M. Beresford CC-BY.

Painted at some point during the first quarter of the twelfth century, the *Durro Antependium* (fig. 1) is the oldest extant treatment of Quiricus and Julitta to have been produced in the kingdoms of Iberia. Notable for its sense of symmetry and proportion, the composition is constructed around a central mandorla depicting the infant Quiricus cradled in his mother's arms, set against a quadripartite background of alternating colours that are subsequently repeated in a diagonal fashion in the four accompanying narrative scenes (Black 2007: 4-6; Palumbo 2008: 19-20). At the outer edge, an elaborate, geometrically repetitive border, consisting of a series of diamonds inlaid with a simplified fleur-de-lis design, formulates an impression of spatial depth. A curious feature is that while the flowers themselves are arranged, as Krysta L. Black (2007: 4) recognizes, in an essentially clockwise pattern, with the white petals of the preceding flower pointing directly towards the red stem of the next, the chronology of the narrative scenes flows in precisely the opposite direction.

Commencing unusually at top right, the narrative adheres to the sequential ordering of the *Acta Apocrypha*, with a representation of Quiricus having nails hammered into his head followed thereafter by depictions of him being sawn in two at top left, boiled along with his mother at bottom left, and at last lacerated by swords in the lower right-hand compartment. An additional element of structural unity is produced by the fact that in each of the four narrative scenes the saints, who are either dressed in blue-green or immersed in a blue-green receptacle, suffer at the hands of a brace of alternating red-clad henchmen, one of whom is clean shaven while the other sports a beard. The most noticeable absentee is Alexander, who could either have been omitted in the interests of economy or else envisioned as a figure who is unable or unwilling to witness the shocking anatomical consequences of his decisions. The painting as a result formulates a very different

impression of alterity, presenting the tortures as the product of a clash between diametrically opposed forces rather than as the whim of a single perverted individual.



Fig. 2. *Quiricus and Julitta*, from the *Durro Antependium*, early twelfth century. Barcelona, Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya. Photo by Andrew M. Beresford CC-BY.

In the central mandorla (fig. 2) Julitta appears seated on a slender wooden throne while Quiricus rests in her lap. The saints are dressed in matching grey-green robes surmounted by a golden mantle – a suggestion, perhaps, of the glorious serenity and comfort of the afterlife – and in each instance a series of boldly sketched black lines conveys an impression of the progressive layering of fabric. Bordered in white dots that stand out against the red background, the halos around their heads signal their position as members of the celestial elect. Their facial features are simply but precisely rendered while their skin is pale and marked by the same red dots (a mechanism for conveying volume) that are visible in the faces of the executioners in the four accompanying narrative scenes (Black 2007: 7). Facing front and gazing directly outwards towards the observer, Julitta wears a nun-like headdress that drapes down the side of her head before falling thereafter in tight folds over her shoulders. Her naked feet – a reference to ascetic piety – extend outwards over the borders of the mandorla, while the ornate sceptre in her right hand, topped by a stylized fleur-de-lis, extends diagonally upwards towards the red, upper-left-hand spandrel. In each instance the suggestion is that, just as she is able to burst out of the mandorla, she retains the power to alight from the comfort of heaven so as to intercede in the never-ending ebb and flow of worldly affairs. Quiricus, in contrast, appears angled slightly to the left, and by gazing diagonally upwards towards his mother, he emphasizes the strength of the bond between them. His feet once again are bare, but in this instance his head remains uncovered, with lines of wavy black hair just visible against the blue-green colour of his halo. A point of particular interest concerns how he extends the fingers of both hands outwards towards the left, complementing the posture of his mother, who extends the thumb of her left-hand outwards towards the right. Although it may be that these details

were included so as to alert the attentions of the observer to the events of their passion and the concomitant progression from suffering to sublime achievement, the fact that they point to each other's names suggests that it should be interpreted as a device for drawing attention to questions of posthumous indivisibility and mutual interdependence.



Fig. 3. *Quiricus and Julitta*, from the *Retaule de sant Quirze i santa Julita*, Pere Garcia de Benavarri, 1456-60.
© Museu Diocesà de Barcelona. Photographer: Guillem F-H.

The question of identity is further complicated by the doubling of Quiricus and Julitta as Christ and the Virgin. In contrast to later artistic representations, notably that of Pere Garcia de Benavarri (fig. 3), which references the iconography of the *Acta Apocrypha* by depicting the saints in conjunction with three of the key emblems of their passion (a misery whip, a knife, and a clutch of seven nails), the *Durro Antependium* opts for a process of partial decontextualization, spelling out the names of the two saints in the central mandorla (*SANCTA IOLITA* and *SANCTUS QUIRICUS*), but presenting them otherwise as typological stand-ins for the Virgin and Child (Horn 2006: 314; Morse 2013: 190). The strength of the parallel is reinforced not solely by the traditional use of the mandorla, which, as Black (2007: 11) recognizes, is reserved elsewhere in early Iberian artworks for treatments of God the Father or Mary and the Infant, but by the traditional association

between the Virgin and the fleur-de-lis, which serves as an emblem of her purity.⁸ Figured in this instance as the finial of a surrogate sceptre, the flower succeeds in raising Julitta to the position of substitute Queen of Heaven, characterizing her son, by implication, as a refraction of Christ himself.⁹ Enthroned thus in majesty, Julitta becomes a focal point for reactions of admiration and awe, functioning ultimately as a type of hologram through which we are able to gain a glimpse of the power and inseparability of the bond between Mary and her son. It becomes tempting as a result to interpret Quiricus, as is the case with Christ, as a product of mystical rather than carnal union, particularly in the absence of a reference to a designated father figure in any of the extant literary or artistic treatments – a point to which we will return.



Fig. 4. *The Massacre of the Innocents*, mid-twelfth century. León, Panteón de Reyes, Basílica de San Isidoro. Photo by Andrew M. Beresford CC-BY.

The doubling of Quiricus as Christ serves in some ways as an anticipation of the later Iberian retable, which frequently locates images of the Nativity alongside representations of the Passion, especially versions of the *pietà*, where the adult Christ appears cradled in his mother's arms as

8. As Chandler Rathfon Post (1930: 236) comments, "The frontal provides the earliest instance of the usurpation of the central compartment by a sacred personage other than the Saviour or the Virgin. The two early Christian saints Julitta and, in her arms, her infant son, Quiricus, whose cult enjoyed particular popularity in Catalonia in the Gothic as well as the Romanesque period, are ensconced in a mandorla and patterned to such a degree after representations of the Virgin and Child that they might be mistaken for these figures, were it not for the designating inscriptions".

9. Given that by the twelfth century the knob had been replaced by the fleur-de-lis on most French sceptres, while up to the time of Alfonso X it had been the most common finial on their Iberian equivalents, Black (2007: 5-6) postulates an additional dimension, affirming that "Julitta is not only associated with the Queen of Heaven, but may also be associated with contemporary Iberian ruling families". Conversely, by replacing the fleur-de-lis by the palm of martyrdom, later compositions, such as the altarpiece from Villamelendo de Valdavia, adopt a more conventional approach.

if he were still an infant (Dobrzeńiecki 1967; Beresford 2018). The process of doubling, which plays on the relationship between tender newborn and sacrificial victim, places a series of unique demands on the observer, inviting a form of affective mimetic engagement in which the clarity of the borderline between subject/object and self/other is partially eroded. Quiricus, depicted in turn as an adult rather than an infant in the four accompanying narrative scenes, becomes subject to a comparable process of ontological destabilization, standing partly in Christ's image as a thirty-three-year-old martyr, and partly as we have seen in the central mandorla, as Julitta's soon-to-be-three-year-old son. A notable analogue is the eighth-century mural cycle from the Theodotus Chapel in the Church of Santa Maria Antiqua in Rome (Childs 2021: 36-37). Although the decision to advance Quiricus's age could potentially be attributed to problems of taste and decorum, it is worth bearing in mind that graphic images of child murder, particularly in the context of the Massacre of the Innocents, were by no means uncommon in the kingdoms of medieval Iberia. Perhaps the most notable early example is the mid-twelfth-century mural sequence in the Basilica de San Isidoro in León (fig. 4), which depicts a succession of infants brutalized at the hands of Herod's henchmen. While some are spitted on lances or pikes, others are either beheaded or hacked to death by sword-wielding aggressors, some of whom (notably the figure at bottom left) are marked by questions of dermal difference. The relative aging of Quiricus should therefore be appraised as part of a deliberate conceptual strategy, exploring, as is the case with the Virgin's relationship to Christ, the complex oscillating tension between emotional reluctance and cognitive acceptance – the instinctive human desire to preserve life pitted against an awareness of the value of sacrifice and the inevitability of eternal salvation.



Fig. 5. *Quiricus Tortured by Nails*, from the *Durro Antependium*, early twelfth century. Barcelona, Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya. Photo by Andrew M. Beresford CC-BY.

In the first of the four tortures, Quiricus has seven nails hammered into his head (fig. 5). Textual authority for the action is offered by the *Acta Apocrypha* (1.6), which records how Alexander, incensed at the refusal to offer sacrifice, orders his henchmen to bring him fourteen keenly sharp-edged nails so that seven can be hammered into the mother (who is here conveniently ignored)

and seven into the son. He adds, with a tone sadistic relish, that two of them should be hammered into the boy's ears so that the pain might pierce his body down to his heels.¹⁰ Although the text subsequently reports that the nails dissolved into snow-like ice crystals before they could be used, the torture is represented here nonetheless in a conspicuously brutal and literalistic manner.¹¹ Quiricus, angled slightly towards the left, stands calmly between a brace of red-clad henchmen, his feet bare and his hands close together –almost, as Black (2007: 7) affirms, as if in a modified gesture of prayer. As the executioners focus their attentions on his sensory faculties, hammering two nails into his ears, two into his eyes, two into his nose, and one into his mouth, he gazes meekly outwards with an expression of pious resignation, displaying no obvious symptoms of suffering or pain. The relative calmness of his stance, as is the case of the other narrative scenes, forms a sharp contrast with the aggressive and dynamic postures adopted by the executioners. While the beardless figure on the left bends his knees, tilts his head, and clasps the saint's forearms so as to gain sufficient leverage, the bearded figure on the right, distinguished by the prominent white girdle around his waist, fixes his gaze unerringly on the saint as he hammers a nail into his eye. In addition to a play on the relationship between vision and the objectifying potential of strategies of coercive domination, their actions establish an element of symmetry, which, as we shall see, is reiterated in the three subsequent narrative scenes.



Fig. 6. *Quiricus Sawn in Two by Alexander's Henchmen*, from the *Duro Antependium*, early twelfth century. Barcelona, Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya. Photo by Andrew M. Beresford CC-BY.

10. "Afferte mihi quatuordecim clavos ferreos, acutos, ferventes: & septem infigite matri & totidem filio; duos insuper mittite in aures pueri, & perforate auditum ejus, ut cæcatis oculis perveniat dolor usque ad calcaneum ejus" ["Bring me fourteen iron nails, sharp-edged, fierce; and hammer seven into the mother and as many into the son; put two more into the ears of the boy and pierce his hearing so that the pain in his eyes may reach even to his heel"] (Papebroch 1701: 29).

11. "Ex jussione Dei frigidi facti sunt clavi quasi cristallus nivis; & puer sanctus laudavit Dominum in tam magnis mirabilibus suis" ["by the order of God the nails became like crystals of snow; and the holy boy praised the Lord for his great wonders"] (Papebroch 1701: 29).

The second torture, chronologically, is sawing (fig. 6).¹² Quiricus, again standing meekly, is depicted in this instance stripped to the waist while raising his hands upwards towards heaven in a gesture that combines pious resignation with an aura of astonishment at the potential for acts of such inhuman barbarity (Barasch 1976). On either side, a brace of executioners, again distinguished by the absence/presence of facial hair, wield a misery whip, producing a bloodstained kerf that extends downwards from the saint's cranium to a position immediately above his solar plexus. Since their actions would have severed Quiricus's brain in two, the fact that he continues to stare humbly outwards towards the observer offers evidence of divine intervention. An additional element of symmetry is produced by the contorted body shapes of Alexander's henchmen, which serve in part as a reference to the physical difficulty of the action and in part as an allusion to the twisted and evil natures of the cultures that they represent. As the two figures grind the saw downwards, visibly drenching its teeth in blood, they reach forwards towards the saint's thighs so as to prevent themselves from slipping as a result of their labour. Equally striking is how the composition generates an impression of spatial depth through the careful positioning of the saint's arms, which are subtly intertwined with the operation of the saw.



Fig. 7. *Quiricus and Julitta Boiled in a Cauldron*, from the *Durro Antependium*, early twelfth century. Barcelona, Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya. Photo by Andrew M. Beresford CC-BY.

12. "Et fecerunt fieri serras ligneas, & secaverunt eos. Illi autem confortati in brachio virtutis Domini, licet gravissimæ poenæ subjacerent superari vel extingui minime potuerunt" (*Acta Apocrypha*, II.14) ["And they made saws of wood, and cut them through. Yet they, being strengthened in the arm by the power of the Lord, although subject to the most grievous punishments, could by no means be overcome or extinguished"] (Papebroch 1701: 31). Two notable analogues are the treatments of the torture in the anonymous *Retaule de sant Quirze i santa Julita* and Garcia de Benavarri's *Retaule de sant Quirze i santa Julita*.

The third torment –being boiled alive in a cauldron full of pitch, wax, and tow (fig. 7) –is the only one to include Julitta. As is the case of the earlier compartments, textual authority is offered by the *Acta Apocrypha*, which explains how Alexander, frustrated at the lack of progress, orders his men to fill a cauldron and set it alight.¹³ Julitta, teetering on the brink of apostacy, begins to weaken in her resolve, but finds strength through Quiricus, who persuades her to join him. They thereafter enter the receptacle, where, miraculously, they experience no pain.¹⁴ Reiterating the symmetrical design of earlier compartments, Quiricus, distinguished by his wavy black hair, sits in this instance on the left, while his mother, whose head covering recalls that of the central mandorla, is positioned on the right. The calmness of their facial expressions, combined with a single, almost touching hand raised upwards in reverence towards heaven, reiterates the mood of pious acceptance and mutual interdependence.¹⁵ The executioners beside them are arranged in a ubiquitously symmetrical fashion, and while the bearded figure on the left extends his poker in order to force Julitta downwards into the cauldron, his clean-shaven companion hooks his stick through the chain on which it is suspended so as to torment her son. As the flames beneath them extend upwards in a form that recalls the fleur-de-lis of the border design and the finial of Julitta's sceptre, the liberal use of red paint –on the wooden frame, the pokers, and even the clothes of the executioners themselves– enhances the overall impression of heat.



Fig. 8. *Quiricus Lacerated by Swords*, from the *Durro Antependium*, early twelfth century. Barcelona, Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya.
Photo by Andrew M. Beresford CC-BY.

13. “Afferte cacabum, & mittite in eo picem, ceram, stuppam, & adhibete ignem” (*Acta apocrypha*, III.17) [“Bring a large pot, and fill it with pitch, wax, and tow, and set it on fire”] (Papebroch 1701: 32). A notable analogue is Garcia de Benavari's *Retaule de sant Quirze i santa Julita*, where the audience is presented in a conspicuously binary fashion, with those on the left clasping their hands together in prayer and those on the right recoiling in disbelief.

14. “Hæc dicens Beata Julitta, ingressa sponte in cacabum cum filio, benedixit Deum, & non est contristata ab igne, neque læsa” (*Acta apocrypha*, III.20) [“Saying these things Blessed Julitta, entering into the pot with her son of her own accord, blessed God, and she was not grieved nor hurt by the fire”] (Papebroch 1701: 33).

15. As Black (2007: 9) affirms, “Julitta's left hand nearly touches Quiricus's right at the point where the torturers' sticks meet. The eye is drawn to this central point in order to draw the distinction between the persecutors' tortuous tools and the martyr's hands raised in prayer. The scene, represented with great care and forethought, provides a powerful message about the power of faith in the midst of great suffering”. For problems of identification, see Post (1930: 236-38; 1938, I: 198-99), Black (2007: 9), Palumbo (2008: 29), and Childs (2021: 37).



Fig. 9. *The Decapitation of Quiricus and Julitta*, from the *Retaule de sant Quirze i santa Julita*, fifteenth century. Barcelona, Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya.
Photo by Andrew M. Beresford CC-BY.



Fig. 10. *Quiricus and Julitta Dismembered*, from the *Retablo de san Quirico y santa Julita*, sixteenth century. Villamelendro de Valdavia, Iglesia de la Asunción.
Photo by Andrew M. Beresford CC-BY.

The final torture (fig. 8) is not just the most ambiguous, but also in many ways the least conceptually evocative – problems that have ensured that its implications have not yet been fully understood. In the *Acta Apocrypha*, Alexander reaches the point of desperation and announces that unless he is able to put Quiricus and Julitta to the sword, he will never be able to destroy them.¹⁶ He then opts for a more specific frame of reference and commands his henchmen to punish their heads, which, understandably, they interpret as a reference to decapitation.¹⁷ The saints are then beheaded before their bodies are dismembered and scattered so as to prevent them from being interred by their fellow Christians.¹⁸ In her reading of the antependium, Black (2007: 8) characterizes Quiricus's laceration as the second (rather than final) torture of the sequence, reading thus from top right to right bottom and then from top left to left bottom. She adds in a footnote (Black 2007: 8, n. 18) that the torture deviates from the account included in the *Acta Apocrypha*, but she does not otherwise attempt to explain its sequential position. The cauldron therefore becomes the final – but by no means climactic – torment to which the saints are subjected. In other Iberian treatments, notably the fifteenth-century *Retaule de sant Quirze i santa Julita* (fig. 9), the emphasis of the concluding narrative scene falls on decapitation, with Julitta gazing downwards at the severed head of her son as she kneels to receive the executioner's sword. A significantly more disturbing conclusion is offered by the sixteenth-century altarpiece from the Iglesia de la Asunción in Villamelendro de Valdavia (fig. 10), where the focus of composition falls on the implications of Alexander's final (rather than initial) command. In this instance, rather than look downwards at a severed head, Julitta gazes at an ugly and misshapen executioner as he progressively dismembers her son, his head and arms already lying scattered on the tiled floor before her. The wounds depicted in the final compartment of the *Durro Antependium* should be regarded in this light as a reference to decapitation and dismemberment rather than as an additional, textually unprecedented torture. The executioners, asserting the coercive potential of the gaze by focusing their vision unerringly on the saint, lay on with their swords, producing fifteen wounds in his body – one of the most notable being the transverse gash in his throat, which could potentially be interpreted as a reference to his impending decapitation. The question that remains concerns the reason why the artist, who showed little hesitation elsewhere in regaling audiences with graphically disturbing images of corporeal mutilation, opted (or was commissioned) in this instance – the final, climactic component of the series – to produce a considerably more conservative and restrained treatment.

16. “Nisi istos interfecero gladio, non possum eos perdere ullis tormentis” (*Acta apocrypha*, III.22) [“Unless I kill them with the sword, I cannot destroy them by any torture”] (Papebroch 1701: 33).

17. “Hæc dicens dedit sententiam de eis ut capite plecterentur” (*Acta apocrypha*, III.22) [“Saying these things, he gave sentence that their heads should be punished”] (Papebroch 1701: 33).

18. “Altera die, congregavit impius Præses multitudinem militum, jussitque corpora membratim dispergi, ne a Christianis raperentur” (*Acta apocrypha*, III.23) [“The next day, the wicked Prefect assembled a large number of soldiers, and ordered the bodies to be scattered, lest they should be carried away by Christians”] (Papebroch 1701: 33).



Fig. 11. *Quiricus and Julitta Arrested in Tarsus*, from the *Retablo de san Quirico y santa Julita*, sixteenth century. Villamelendo de Valdavia, Iglesia de la Asunción. Photo by Andrew M. Beresford CC-BY.



Fig. 12. *Quiricus and Julitta Invited to Offer Sacrifice*, from the *Retaule de sant Quirze i santa Julita*, Pere Garcia de Benavarri, 1456-60. © Museu Diocesà de Barcelona. Photographer: Guillem F-H.



Fig. 13. *The Whipping of St Quiricus*, from the *Retaule de sant Quirze i santa Julita*, Pere Garcia de Benavarri, 1456-60. © Museu Diocesà de Barcelona. Photographer: Guillem F-H.



Fig. 14. *St Quiricus Converts Alexander's Prisoners to Christianity*, from the *Retaule de sant Quirze i santa Julita*, Pere Garcia de Benavarri, 1456-60.
© Museu Diocesà de Barcelona. Photographer: Guillem F-H.



Fig. 15. *Quiricus and Julitta in the Bespoke Instrument of Torture*, from the *Retaule de sant Quirze i santa Julita*, fifteenth century. Barcelona, Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya.
Photo by Andrew M. Beresford CC-BY.

In its totality, the *Durro Antependium* offers a curiously simplified reading of the *Acta Apocrypha*. In contrast to the *Retablo de san Quirico y santa Julita*, which includes a treatment of the arrest of the saints in Tarsus (fig. 11), or Garcia de Benavarri's *Retaule de sant Quirze i santa Julita*, which explores the refusal to offer sacrifice (fig. 12), the narrative sequence commences effectively *in medias res*, with a brace of henchmen hammering nails into Quiricus's head for reasons that remain unstated. Yet even this, chronologically, is not the first torture. As a punishment for refusing to offer sacrifice, Quiricus –the *Acta Apocrypha* affirms– is first whipped in front of his mother, an event reproduced by Garcia de Benavarri (fig. 13) but inverted in the literary accounts descended from Theodore's version, which describe how Julitta is flagellated in front of her son.¹⁹ Equally curious is how the antependium focuses on torture at the expense of the role of the miraculous or the ability to proselytize. Since the episode with Alexander's shoes –by far the most outlandish and distinctive miracle in the *Acta Apocrypha*– is not included in any of the other early Iberian treatments, it may be that it was adjudged to represent too complex or implausible a topic to be considered worthy of inclusion. The same, however, is not true of the conversion of the prisoners, which serves a crucial structural function in the work of Garcia de Benavarri (fig. 14),

19. "Hæc eo orante, cædentes eum defecerunt; cumque deposuissent illum, viderunt eum sanum absque omni læsione, acsi nullas plagas sustinisset" (*Acta apocrypha*, 1.4) ["When he prayed these things, they beat him and withdrew; and when they had laid him down, they saw that he was healthy without any injury, as if he had sustained no wounds"] (Papebroch 1701: 29). Conversely, in Voragine's text, the polarity is inverted: "Preses igitur puerum in ulnis suis cepit et matrem sacrificare nolentem crudis nervis flagellari precepit" ["Then the Prefect took the boy in his arms and ordered his mother to be whipped with rough thongs when she refused to sacrifice"] (Maggioni 1998, 1: 532).

where Quiricus is presented as a source of wisdom and authority. A related issue is that despite the emphasis on torture, the antependium overlooks many of the *Acta Apocrypha*'s most distinctive episodes. In addition to references to flaying, strangling, burning, and the severing of Quiricus's tongue –events that are not depicted elsewhere– the composition could also potentially have included a treatment of the bespoke instrument of torture, an episode explored with aplomb in the anonymous *Retaule de sant Quirze i santa Julita* (fig. 15), where the saints are placed inside a copper wheel inlaid with a series of razor-sharp knives. A final major idiosyncrasy, as we have seen, is that in place of a compelling *coup de grâce*, the narrative concludes with an image that not only fails to capture the violence of its original, but which is considerably less shocking or definitive than any of the preceding torments. It is possibly for this reason that Black (2007), whose analysis otherwise represents one of the most astute and sensitive contributions to the topic, is unable to locate it in an appropriate narrative sequence.

The selectively decontextualized nature of the *Durro Antependium* ensures that the focus of composition falls on the relationship between terrestrial suffering and celestial reward. Rather than characterize Quiricus and Julitta as figures who are detained and tortured by a specific individual for a specific reason, they are instead envisioned as universalized representations of Christian suffering, enduring their fate at the hands of a generically malevolent and destructive other. The process, which begins with the hammering of nails into Quiricus's head, remains uninterrupted by public-facing demonstrations of thaumaturgic ability, which would have introduced an impression of inimitable exceptionality, or representations of proselytizing acumen, which could potentially have elevated the saints in the mind of the observer to the position of ministers of the Church. The composition succeeds as a result in departing from the emphasis of the *Acta Apocrypha* by casting Quiricus and Julitta in a more humble and everyday light. Their suffering, which becomes a metaphor for Christian service, demonstrates how the endurance of pain culminates in the comfort and serenity of everlasting life in heaven, precisely as the central mandorla suggests, rather than in the death of the physical body –an event that is, of course, omitted from the composition. The strength of the correlation is reinforced by the careful overlaying of the identities of Quiricus and Julitta onto those of Christ and the Virgin, which suggests by extension that just as the early Christian martyrs rendered themselves Christ-like by imitating his suffering, those who in turn gaze upon the brutalization of Quiricus and Julitta will not only become able to emulate their endeavours, but to map the coordinates of their identities onto those of Christ and his mother. The mandorla functions in this respect not just as the dominant image of the composition, but as the nucleus of a series of concentric circles that extend outwards intradiegetically from Christ and the Virgin towards Quiricus and Julitta, in whose image they are cast, and thereafter extradiegetically towards external viewers, who are encouraged –as the result of a process of affective mimetic identification– to engage in a process of *imitatio martyris*, and ultimately, *imitatio Christi* and *imitatio Mariae* (Black 2007: 27).

It becomes difficult in this sense to disagree with Black's (2007) assumption that the representation of torture transcends time and becomes applicable to the specific social milieux in which the antependium was produced. Far from a distant event, illustrative of a turbulent, formative, and half-forgotten period of Christian history, the martyrdom of Quiricus and Julitta is transported forwards through time and transposed geographically from East to West, mapping the events of fourth-century Anatolia onto the particulars of twelfth-century Iberia. The saints, who suffer for their faith, display exemplary passivity and imperviousness to pain, secure in the knowledge that their endeavours will not just be recognized, but will succeed in transforming them into surrogate incarnations of Christ and the Virgin. The message for ordinary believers is that pain should not be rejected –as instinct dictates– but embraced as a hermeneutic for self-definition. Rather than

cower in fear or give voice to expressions of lamentation or despair, the devout should strive in turn to achieve the crown of martyrdom, regarding death not as the end of life, but as the fulcrum of a see-saw ambivalence capable of transporting them to the realm of everlasting bliss implied by the mandorla. The antependium stands thus, as Black (2007) suggests, as a comment on the social tensions of the age, and in particular, the perils of the Reconquest, equating Quiricus, who is brutalized by a succession of torments, with the warrior classes of medieval Iberia, and Julitta, as their symbolic mother, a figure who succeeds, as is the case of the *Acta Apocrypha*, in focusing her attentions on the crown of martyrdom rather than the mortal perishability of the physical body.

The assumption, however, that the executioners constitute specific stylized representations of the Muslim infidel, is one that stands on much weaker ground. Although their costumes have been conspicuously modernized (Black 2007: 57), with the girdle of the bearded executioner in the initial compartment potentially suggesting a crescent moon – a symbol, first adopted in Byzantium, that later spread throughout the Islamic world – the correspondence between their facial features and those of Quiricus and Julitta makes it difficult to interpret the composition as anything other than a broadly defined metaphor for suffering in the face of brutality. In contrast to the French *chansons de geste*, which, as Black (2007: 57, n. 178) recognizes, describe the Saracens as being blonde and handsome, the tendency in medieval Iberian art and literature is to equate the dermal darkness of the Islamic inhabitants of southern Spain with that of the Devil, depicting both as the antithesis of the pristinely white Christian self. A notable example is the *Retablo de san Quirico y santa Julita* (figs 10, 11, and 16), which envisions the humiliations inflicted on the saints as products of the malevolent, dark-skinned other, an ontological hybrid capable of bringing to mind suggestions of Islamic or even Semitic alterity. A comparable process is evident in the mid-twelfth-century mural sequence in the Basílica de San Isidoro in León, where, as we have seen (fig. 4), some of the executioners are marked equally by questions of dermal difference. In place, therefore, of an interpretation that could potentially be regarded as reductive, it becomes important to appreciate the universality of the antependium, approaching it as a malleable and mobile metaphor capable of shedding light on topics as diverse as the enemy within, the abuse of authority, or even the broader social and political rivalries of the kingdoms of the Christian north.

3 Infanticide and Martyrdom in the *Gran flos sanctorum*

In contrast to the *Acta Apocrypha*, which focuses initially on Julitta, the *Gran flos sanctorum* – the most accomplished and comprehensive of the various medieval Castilian hagiographic anthologies – reasserts the traditional primacy of gender by commencing with an enumeration of the qualities of Quiricus rather than his mother.²⁰ In a six-part extrapolation of the etymological significance of his name, audiences are informed that he is humble, strong, self-deprecating, warlike in his engagement with his adversaries, receptive to divine instruction, and gracious beyond his years. Julitta, in contrast, is relegated to the position of life helper, partly because she is pious in her bearing, and partly because she guides others, notably her son, towards the Christian truth. She stands thus in contradistinction to figures such as the virgin martyr, whose incorporation into the ranks of the celestial elect is commonly celebrated – as is the case with infants such as Quiricus – as a triumph over nature. Yet the narrative proper focuses predominantly on Julitta's fate rather than

20. For the *Gran flos sanctorum*, see Thompson-Walsh (1986-87), Baños (2003, 2009, 2010), Hernández (2008), Beresford (2010a: 1-57), and Aragüés (2012, 2014, 2016).

that of her son. Having fled from Iconium (now Konya) in south-western Anatolia (now Turkey) to avoid persecution, she travels some two hundred or so miles to Tarsus, which, at the time, was capital of the Roman Province of Cilicia. The journey, which recalls the Flight into Egypt, reiterates the notion of doubling evident in the *Durro Antependium*, mapping the identities of Quiricus and Julitta onto those of Christ and the Virgin. The strength of the parallel is reinforced by the fact that just as the Holy Family were reputed to have been abducted along the way (an episode explored with aplomb by the thirteenth-century *Libre dels tres reys d'Orient*), Julitta is soon arrested and placed in a situation of greater mortal peril.²¹ Her serving maids, who opt to flee rather than assist her, are figured as foils to the Apostles, who, as Christ predicted, betray him by fleeing after his arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26: 31-35; Mark 14: 27-31). The text as a result offers a reminder not just Christ's birth, but of his death, partially conflating, as is the case of the *Durro Antependium*, the identities of infant and adult.

In place of the protracted and largely implausible speeches of the *Acta Apocrypha*, the *Gran flos sanctorum* adopts a more streamlined and disciplined approach, eliminating the ebb and flow of judicial debate in its entirety. Julitta, characterized as a largely silent presence, is ordered to offer sacrifice, but when she refuses, she is condemned to be whipped with rough thongs of leather. Whether or not she screams out in pain or bleeds copiously from her wounds are questions that remain unanswered. Quiricus, who, in the absence of serving maids, is cradled at this point in Alexander's arms, serves as the principal witness to events. As the result of an instinctive process of mimetic identification, he begins to weep bitterly and give voice to impassioned screams, compensating for the absence of dialogue by offering one of the most primal of all possible reactions. Alexander, in response, sets the boy on his knee and begins to kiss and cajole him, formulating himself as a paradoxical amalgam of judge and would-be-surrogate father, a figure capable at once of nurturing life as well as destroying it. The principal unintended consequence is that in addition to an unwelcomed source of warmth and affection, he succeeds in offering the boy a more direct and harrowing view of the abuse of power. For this reason, Quiricus turns his head and scratches Alexander's face with his fingernails, weeping and screaming as if to affirm that he too is a Christian. He then shatters one of the most primal and universal of taboos by sinking his teeth into his flesh. The text plays thus on the process of identification and repudiation associated with the gaze, with Quiricus not just refusing to look at Alexander's face, but actively seeking to mutilate it. It also functions as a reference to the reciprocal nature of torture, figuring the infant as a type of *miles Christi* in the making, or as the prefatory discussion of etymology affirms, a lance with which to wage war on the enemy. The implicit unstated assumption is that those who seek to inflict violence will be punished in turn for their actions.

As Irena Martínková and Jim Parry (2015) have observed, biting is an inherently transgressive act that serves ultimately as a boundary sign, a clear and transparent mechanism for disaggregating self from other. In contrast to the untamed savage, who imitates the actions of animals in biting and then consuming human flesh, the civilized self, whether individual or collective, attains subjectivity by eschewing such primitive acts of barbarism. The biting of human beings serves in this sense as a representation of all that the virtuous individual is not. Yet Quiricus, by scratching and then biting Alexander, succeeds in inverting this polarity. Lauded rather than censured for his actions, he serves as an encapsulation of militant Christian resistance, a figure who, although at a pre-linguistic stage of development, is able to combat the tyranny of Roman authority by adopting a non-verbal mechanism for articulating expressions of repudiation and disavowal. An obvious analogue is the

21. For readings of the episode, see Alvar (1965), Chaplin (1967), Deyermond & Connolly (1984), Richardson (1984), Zubillaga (2014), and Beresford (2021).

tale of the martyr in the garden in the legend of St Paul of Thebes (Beresford 2010b). Having been captured and tied up by the Romans, the young man severs his tongue with his teeth so as to spit it in the face of the harlot who has been tasked with the responsibility of corrupting his virtue. He becomes able in this way to transform his body, as is the case with Quiricus, into a weapon of primal resistance.

Incensed at the insult, Alexander throws the infant from his arms and dashes his brains out against the tribunal steps. By committing the crime of infanticide, he succeeds in exchanging one boundary sign for another, enabling the text in so doing to explore a range of complex conceptual relationships. Just as the act of biting, which blurs the distinction between self and other, produces reactions of abjection, particularly in terms of the exchange of bodily fluids and attendant notions of ritual contamination, as Quiricus falls down the tribunal steps, the separation of brain from body results in the collapse of the once clearly demarcated borderline between internal and external, serving thus as an axiomatic trigger for reactions of abjection and disgust. While in the first instance two bodies become one, in the latter, one body becomes two. Accordingly, it becomes possible to characterize Alexander not just as a monster, a ruthless murderer of innocent children, but as a figure who stands in marked contradistinction to both mother and child. In his capacity as a putative father, embracing and even attempting to kiss a child that is not his own, he serves as a shadowy, liminal presence, comparable in some respects to Joseph, whose tenuous relationship to Christ and the Virgin is appraised in some texts –notably in Gómez Manrique's *Representación del nacimiento de Nuestro Señor*– as a subject of ridicule (Deyermond 1998; Beresford 2018). Most telling, however, is his relationship to Julitta, for while from the perspective of queer theory it could be argued that he serves as the birthing mother to Quiricus's celestial self, enabling his soul to progress heavenward by leaving his body, it is noticeable by the same token that while Julitta produced life –the act of birth enabling the inner to become the outer– the spilling of Quiricus's brain offers an entirely different reading of the internal/external dialectic, characterizing Alexander, her male antithesis, as an inversely proportionate producer of death.

In the natural world, infanticide tends to serve as a mechanism for regulating issues of sexual selection. When joining a new group, male mammals often resolve to kill infants sired by their competitors so that lactational amenorrhea (or postpartum infertility) can be terminated and their mothers returned to a state of estrus (or heat). The infanticidal male stands thus at a considerable reproductive advantage: in addition to promoting his own gene pool while wiping out the offspring of his competitors, he could also potentially sire a greater number of young than if he had resolved not to kill (Hrdy 1974; Hausfater 1984: 500; Brown 1996: 174; Packer 2000: 830; Lukas-Huchard 2014: 841). The process, as Anne Innis Dagg (2000: 831) recognizes, is one that extends into the human domain inasmuch as stepfathers have been found to be statistically more likely than biological fathers to murder their own children. Although in Alexander's case, of course, there is no explicit sexual motive, the fact that he lapses into the role of would-be-surrogate father and thereafter murders the offspring of another man, casts him in the role of a brute and uncivilized animal, a figure who attempts to bolster an impression of masculine dominance (and, indeed, the relative fragility of his ego) by dashing out the brains of a three-year-old boy.

Equally striking is that, like an animal, Alexander shows no obvious signs of guilt or contrition for the crime that he commits. In contrast to societies that seek to maintain the genetic health of the population through the removal of congenital malformations at birth, or parents faced by the dilemma of raising a sickly or deformed child that could become a strain on their resources, he murders a perfectly healthy infant as the result of a fit of pique (Post 1988; Cavanagh *et al.* 2005; Cormack 2012: 202). Although it could be argued that his motivation is to preserve the spiritual rather than the genetic health of the nation, the child, who belongs as much to the community as

to its mother, exchanges places in this sense with the adult, who becomes envisioned as a force of wanton, juvenile destruction, a figure capable of depopulating and thereby polluting the society in which he serves. He succeeds thereby in destabilizing the conventions of normative reality, characterizing himself not as the pinnacle of society –the nodal point around which like-minded individuals are invited to coalesce– but as a pariah, an outsider, a figure without an adult or educated understanding of the value of normative human interactions and their importance in constructing an ordered and civilized society.

Quiricus's murder serves equally as a mechanism for destabilizing traditional gender paradigms. Although human sacrifice is explicitly forbidden in the Old Testament, which replaces it with animal offerings and the covenant of circumcision (Exodus 13: 1-16; Numbers 3: 11-13; Deuteronomy 15: 19-23; Jeremiah 7: 31), it is envisioned in certain instances as a test through which male believers are able to reassess or reiterate their loyalty to God (Newman 1995; McCracken 2002). In contrast to female subjects such as the mothers of 2 Kings 6, whose actions serve purely as manifestations of the monstrous (Garroway 2018), Abraham is instructed to slay Isaac as a test of faith, while Jephthah murders his daughter so as to avoid breaking a promise.²² Their actions are subordinated in this sense to the pursuit of a higher good. Yet by committing a primitive act of vengeance, Alexander undermines his masculinity and changes places with Julitta. Devoid of sacrificial logic, the spontaneous slaying of Quiricus falls outside culturally sanctioned approaches to ritual, which are not just communally benevolent but capable of reinforcing conventional hierarchies and privileges (Girard 1977), and so becomes associated with projections of monstrosity, and in particular, the monstrous feminine. An obvious analogue is Lady Macbeth, who, in an attempt to galvanize her husband into pursuing the path to power, vows that she would pluck the nursing infant from her breast and, like Alexander on the tribunal steps, spill its brain from its body.²³

The legend in this respect is deeply ironic, and on more than one level. In traditionally misogynist thought, notions of monstrosity associated with the womb, the vagina, and the contagiously impure blood flows of menstruation succeed in characterizing the female subject, as Jeffrey Jerome Cohen affirms, as "difference made flesh" (1996: 7). It is partly for this reason that female monstrosity has been tied not just to sexuality but to maternity, and in particular, the fear of falling back into and of being devoured by the mother as the very first abject other. Infanticide, serving thus as a manifestation of female agency, stands in contradistinction to the presumed masculine hegemonic orthodoxy of human sacrifice and so has been appraised as a boundary sign capable of marking out or reinforcing impressions of alterity. Just as the Jews attributed infanticide to the Canaanites, medieval Christians levelled comparable accusations against witches, heretics, Muslims, Jews, and later, the indigenous peoples of Central and Latin America, where they were used as a justification for acts of religious warfare and genocide (Malkiel 1993; Idelson-Shein 2014: 40). A notable early example is the mid thirteenth-century Crusade poem, *¡Ay Jherusalem!*, which characterizes the Muslim forces of reconquest as the sub-human antithesis of the collectivized Christian self.²⁴ By

22. See respectively Genesis 22 and Judges 11. For Barbara Newman (1995: 77), "The meaning of child sacrifice remains constant from antiquity. As a supreme test of religious devotion or honour, the primitive command to slay a child presupposes intense parental love –no sacrifice could be more painful, and therefore more precious".

23. "I would, while it was smiling in my face, / Have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums, / And dashed the brains out" (*Macbeth*, 1.7, lines 56-58; Wells 1986: 1106). As Peggy McCracken (2002: 56) affirms, "There are no biblical examples of mothers who sacrifice their children; when a mother kills her child, the infanticide is always a murder".

24. The most strident accusation is that in addition to roasting children (presumably in order to consume them), they simultaneously subjected their mothers to forced mastectomies so that they would no longer be able to nurse them: "Veen los christianos a sus fijos asar, / veen a sus mugeres biuas destetar" (Pescador del Hoyo 1960: 246, lines 96-97).

enabling and then celebrating Quiricus's murder as a form of sacrifice (albeit by proxy), Julitta succeeds –like Abraham or Jephthah– in strengthening her bond with the divine while associating herself with the traditionally masculine positives of order and reason. Alexander, conversely, stands not just as a symbol of chaos and unrestrained emotion, but as a source of abject contamination and pollution, a type of monstrous birthing mother who, by ejecting the infant from the pseudo-uterine security of his lap, succeeds in staining the tribunal steps with the post-partum blood of the innocent.

On a deeper associative level, Quiricus's murder establishes a parallel between Alexander and Pharaoh, who, as Exodus 1: 15-22 affirms, ordered the Hebrew midwives to slay their new-born male offspring so as to prevent their numbers from expanding. It also recalls the Passover (Exodus 11: 4-6), in which the first-born males of Egypt were slaughtered as a punishment for the ongoing enslavement of the Jews. A series of additional analogues, many of which discuss the murder of infants in terms of bashing their heads against rock or dashing them to pieces (Mans 1997: 100, n. 1), are offered by 2 Kings 8: 12, Psalms 137: 9, Isaiah 13: 16-18, Jeremiah 13: 14, Ezekiel 9: 5-6, and Nahum 3: 10. Yet by far the most telling parallel is with the Massacre of the Innocents, which has a unique bearing on questions of interpretation. According to Matthew 2, the Magi, having been warned in a dream about Herod's duplicity, opted to return to their kingdoms by a different route, causing him to become so enraged that he issued an order to slay all of the boys aged two or under in Bethlehem and its vicinity. His soldiers thereafter enacted his command by wrenching the infants from the arms of their mothers and subjecting them to a range of brutal and sadistic torments, a topic explored in graphic detail in early Iberian art and literature, where, as we have seen (fig. 4), they are commonly spitted on pikes or hacked to death with swords.²⁵

Herod stands thus not just as a symbol of blindness, stupidity, and the shameless corruption of power, but as the very epitome of human wickedness, a figure who, like Alexander, lacks a conscience or even the faintest glimmer of a potentially redeeming character trait. It is for this reason that he was subsequently punished by a terrifying affliction that, in addition to the spread of conditions such as dropsy and gangrene, caused his genitals to liquefy and swarm with maggots.²⁶ Conversely, since the development of speech was linked to the capacity for iniquity, it was commonly assumed that the Innocents had undergone a baptism by blood and had thereafter ascended to heaven in a state of prelapsarian grace, a reward that later saints, notably the ascetics, would have taken a lifetime to achieve. Celebrated accordingly as protomartyrs from the late second century onwards, the infants serve both as exemplars and Christological surrogates, figures who –like the three-year-old Quiricus in the *Gran flos sanctorum*– demonstrate a willingness to embrace martyrdom even though they were as yet incapable of offering a clear and unambiguous articulation of faith.

The most noticeable consequence of the Alexander/Herod parallel is that it further complicates the relationship between the literal and the figurative, equating Alexander with the callousness and

For readings of the poem, see Asensio (1960), Deyermond (1977), Romera (1984), Grieve (1986), Tato (1988), Victorio (1988), Rogers (1992), Tena (1995), and Franchini (2005).

25. The *Libre dels tres reys d'Orient* offers a graphically disturbing description of their brutality: "Quantos niños fallavan, / todos los descabeçavan: / por las manos los tomavan / por poco que los tiravan, / sacavan a las vegadas / los braços con las espaldas" (Zubillaga 2014: 187, lines 60-65).

26. The punishment is recorded in the *Gran flos sanctorum*: "E como Herodes llegase a los setenta años, cayó en una grave enfermedad, ca le vino una grand fiebre, e quedóle después de la fiebre grand comezón e grand dolor de la cerviz e finchamiento de los pies e tal enfermedad en los miembros de la generación que se le fazían en ellos gusanos e davan de sí grand fedor" (Biblioteca Nacional de España, MS 12688, fols 109^{vb}-10^{ra}). For Herod in the Middle Ages, see Temple (1959), Staines (1976), Skey (1983), Mans (1997), Park (2013), Doane (2017), and Childs (2021).

cruelty traditionally associated with the Jews, and Quiricus, with the purity of the Innocents, and by extension, of Christ himself. The process, which echoes conventionally anti-Semitic readings of the Crucifixion, is one in which the question of responsibility is effectively reassigned from the Romans to the Jews, figuring Alexander, by implication, not just as a typological representation of Herod, but of those who persuaded the reluctant Pontius Pilate to condemn Christ to suffer the agonizing brutality of death on the cross. The text succeeds thus, as is the case of the *Durro Antependium*, in collapsing the relationship between infanticide and deicide, a notion that culminates in the late medieval fondness for images that destabilize perceptions of identity by visualizing Christ's infant (rather than his adult) self as the principal protagonist of the Crucifixion (Beresford 2018). The Jews, envisioned correspondingly as deliberate unbelievers, figures who were not necessarily blind to the truth, but who willingly and maliciously opted to ignore it, became associated in the medieval Christian imagination with the irrational, the murderous, and ultimately, the infanticidal and the deicidal. These associations, which, as various critics have recognized, were disseminated in particular by Franciscan and Dominican preachers, who sought to replace the more benign and tolerant approach advocated by St Augustine with a more aggressive and confrontational model, circulated initially during the twelfth century before becoming dominant in the thirteenth (Cohen 1983; Gilchrist 1988; Stacey 1998; Despres 1998; Tinkle 2003, 2004).

Distinct both aetiologically and phenomenologically from traditional Christian anti-Judaism, this new medieval attitude of intolerance was predicated in part on passages such as Romans 11: 7-8, which emphasizes the notion of collective blindness, and the Parable of the Tenants, which depicts the Jews in a malevolently avaricious and homicidal light (Matthew 21: 33-39; Mark 12: 1-8; Luke 20: 9-15; John 15: 22-24). They were regarded accordingly in the Middle Ages not just as host-wounders who deliberately sought to inflict pain on Christ by attacking the mystical potency of the Eucharist, or as cannibals who murdered and consumed the blood of Christians for magical or ritual purposes, but as figures who eagerly sought to subject infants –Christian or otherwise– to a range of callous and brutal fates. In addition to visual representations of Abraham and Isaac, which counterpoint questions of difference by depicting the father (but not the son) with a stereotypically hooked nose, and the legends of boy saints such as William of Norwich, who was reputedly murdered by a group of Jews, a tale disseminated widely throughout Europe describes how a little Jewish boy attends Mass and receives the Eucharist, incurring the wrath of his father, who promptly throws him into an oven. He is thereafter saved from burning to death by the Virgin, whose purgative and restorative powers serve as a metaphor for the salvific efficacy of Communion, and ultimately, of the undying benevolence of nurturing mother Ecclesia.²⁷

A distinctive feature of the Herod/Alexander parallel is that while the former delegates the responsibility for infanticide to his henchmen, the latter conflates the roles of judge and executioner by ejecting Quiricus from his lap and dashing his brain out against the tribunal steps. The action, which, as the various Old Testament references to child murder suggest, is not just one of primal brutality –a crude, cavemanlike mechanism for ensuring the cessation of life– but one that stands in stark contradistinction to the martial precision of Herod's men, who, as we have seen (fig. 4), are traditionally depicted as armour-clad soldiers wielding weapons such as lances and swords. It becomes tempting, in view of this, to reconsider the specific spatial configuration of the *Durro Antependium*, which, by eliminating the role of Alexander in its entirety, focuses instead on the interaction between the saints and their executioners. In contrast to later compositions, where

27. In addition to the *Legenda Aurea* reading for the Assumption (15 August), the tale of the Jewish boy is given in Gonzalo de Berceo's *Milagros de Nuestra Señora* (Baños 1997: 87-92, no. XVI) and the *Cantigas de Santa Maria* (Mettmann 1986, I: 63-66, n. 4).

Alexander is identified unambiguously as master of proceedings –an enthroned, hook-nosed potentate replete with a bejewelled, turban-like headdress or pointed, Jewish-style tower hat– the encounter is shaped instead as a direct confrontation between those who have been commanded to inflict pain and those whose faith is solemnized by the endurance of it.²⁸

In place, therefore, of an impression of uncontrollable rage leading in an instant to a single, explosive moment of human-to-human contact, the act of infanticide is transmuted into a constant, ongoing threat that, as we have seen, has no obvious beginning or end. No longer spatially present, Alexander –like Herod before him– wields weapons at a distance through the use of surrogates, and so is no longer compelled to serve as an intradiegetic witness to the appalling physical consequences of his mandates. The fate of Quiricus can be related in this sense to that of saints such as Bartholomew and Stephen, who, having been abducted by the Devil as infants, are abandoned in the wilderness so that they will be devoured by wild animals or die of exposure.²⁹ The common denominator is that, in contrast to the *Gran flos sanctorum*, which envisions Quiricus's murder as a product of Alexander's blunt physicality, the identity of the murderer is no longer recorded –as Elaine Scarry (1985: 213) has cogently observed– in the structure of the weapon itself. In fact, having given the order to subject the infant to a bizarrely protracted sequence of torments, the Alexander of the *Durro Antependium* is able to withdraw to a safely depersonalized distance, secure in the knowledge that his wishes will be fulfilled.

4 St Julitta and the Problem of Pious Motherhood

As is the case with Herod, whose reaction to the Massacre of the Innocents is not recorded in the Bible or in vernacular compositions such as the *Libre dels tres reys d'Orient*, the *Gran flos sanctorum* omits discussion of Alexander so as to focus instead on Julitta, who, in place of an emotionally charged outpouring of grief and inner turmoil, revels in the fact that Quiricus has succeeded in ascending to heaven before her. Her reaction, which stands in contradistinction to those of the mothers of the Innocents, who are traditionally depicted as archetypes of inconsolable suffering, makes it important to consider the tension between emotional reluctance and cognitive acceptance, with the legend of Quiricus and Julitta prioritizing the unfailing assurance of salvific certainty over the instinctively maternal desire to preserve human life. Opting for a stylized and allusive frame of reference, the major source for the Innocents, Matthew 2, does not discuss the mothers on a direct or individual basis, but instead interprets them as typological refractions of Rachel, who, as Sébastien Doane recognizes, is characterized in Jeremiah 31: 15 “as the symbolic mother of the nation: defeated, exiled and suffering” (2017: 7). Just as Rachel wept vicariously and refused to be comforted over the loss of her children, the mothers of the Innocents –now appraised in her image– weep inconsolably for the infants slain by Herod's men. She serves thus not just as a metaphor for their sadness and desolation, but for that of the Virgin, who absorbs and transcends her typological legacy in her capacity as the archetypal *mater dolorosa* (or grieving mother). Rachel has commonly been envisioned, in view of this, both as an archetype of grieving womanhood and,

28. Notable examples include the altarpiece by Garcia de Benavari (figs 3, 12, 13, and 14), the anonymous fifteenth-century *Retable de saint Quirze i santa Julita* (figs 9 and 15), where Alexander also holds a royal sceptre, and the *Retablo de san Quirico y santa Julita* from Villamelendro de Valdavia (figs 10, 11, and 16), which offers the most distinctive and thought-provoking reading of dermal difference.

29. For abandonment and exposure, see Dickeman (1975), Boswell (1984), Patterson (1985), Post (1988), Harris (1994), Evans Grubbs (2011), Vuolanto (2011), Lawing (2013), and Sawyer (2018).

like Mary, as a representation of nurturing mother Ecclesia, a figure who, according to St Thomas Aquinas, laments all of the tender young lambs slain in the service of the divine.³⁰ A passage pregnant with suggestiveness in this respect is Matthew 27: 55-56, which describes how a large retinue of female followers –which has traditionally been thought to include the mothers of the now long dead Innocents– travelled from afar so as to witness the events of the Crucifixion, vicariously revivifying their anguish by lamenting the fate of the one infant that managed to escape.³¹

Although the mothers are reduced in this way, as Kathleen Nolan (1996: 95) affirms, to a largely shadowy presence, with the loss of their infants appraised as the fulfilment of prophecy, they stand nonetheless as representations of the unshatterable human bond between mother and son. In medieval artworks, where they are commonly depicted as equal being in scale and as numerous as Herod's men, they tend to be paired with infants whom they struggle to protect or mourn (Alcoy 1985; Quintana de Uña 1987; Jacobus 1999). While some of them clutch their offspring in a desperate attempt to shield them from the blows of Herod's henchmen, others cradle the dead or dying infants in their arms, often pressing their heads affectionately to their faces or breasts. This gut-wrenching evocation of unbearable loss elicits a deeply visceral and affective response, which, although universal, raises particular implications for an understanding of Christian motherhood. In contrast to the findings of Philippe Ariès (1962), who proposed that medievals did not recognize childhood as a separate phase of life and so remained emotionally detached from their young as a protective response to the high rate of infant mortality, the majority of more recent studies have opted for a different approach, acknowledging both the discrete phases of childhood development and the profound parental attachment to the young (Boswell 1984, 1988; Shahar 1990; Hanawalt 2002; Classen 2005). This work, which accords with the emphasis of the *Ordo Rachelis*, a medieval liturgical drama in which the grieving Rachel is afforded a prominent speaking role (Young 1919), as well as sermons –notably that of St Bernard, which argues that the Innocents should receive crowns that attest to their full status as martyrs (Priest of Mount Melleray 1950)– can be read in conjunction with medieval treatments of the grieving mothers in which they function effectively, as Nolan avers, as a chorus of mourners, “often with the raised arms, dishevelled hair, and torn clothing of classical lamentation ritual” (1996: 102). While some of them raise their hands and tear out their hair in acts of impassioned self-mutilation (Barasch 1976), others attack the very quintessence of their femininity by wrenching violently at their now prominently exposed breasts. They serve in this sense both as stylized representations of grief and of the ineluctable nature of maternal instinct (Alexiou 1974; Binski 1996; Nolan 1996).

Of the various images that Nolan (1996: 104) addresses in her study, a particularly thought-provoking example is the *Psalter of Christina of Markyate*, which depicts one of the mothers responding instinctively to the massacre by sinking her teeth into the exposed leg of one of Herod's henchmen. The action, which recalls the biting of Alexander, is inverted in the *Winchester Psalter* (Nolan 1996: 106), where a fierce-looking soldier grips a dead or dying infant in his teeth,

30. “*Rachel*. Id est Ecclesia, suos teneros agnos plorat peremptos” [*Rachel*. That is the Church, laments her slain young lambs”] (cited in Tinkle 2004: 14). For the typological relationship between Rachel, Mary, and the mothers of the Innocents, see Temple (1959), Nolan (1996), Tinkle (2004), Park (2013: 482), and Doane (2017).

31. As Kathleen Nolan (1996: 124) affirms, “only Mary's baby, tightly held in the Virgin's arms, was rescued, whereas those of other women were torn from their mothers' embraces and slaughtered. At the same time everyone knew how the story of that baby would end, how Mary's grief would parallel that of the other mothers, and how, as widespread medieval tradition had it, her sufferings would echo that of her son, whose sufferings, in turn, would lead to the salvation of all mothers and children”. She adds that “the close juxtaposition between Mary and the other women seems to emphasize the parallels between their experiences, to dignify the grief of the ordinary mothers, just as the juxtaposition of the slaughtered children with Jesus, in whose place they died, elevates their deaths to martyrdoms”.

presumably in an attempt to consume him. In view of the importance of boundary signs, it seems likely that the relationship between infanticide and biting points to a deep-seated psychological association capable of transforming the encounter –and, by extension, the legend of Quiricus and Julitta– into a malleable and mobile metaphor capable of affixing itself to almost any form of alterity. Important in this respect is the work of Kristine Edmondson Haney (1986: 34–35), which equates an explosion of interest in the Innocents in twelfth-century England to reports of brutality under King Stephen, thereby overlaying the monstrousness of Herod onto accounts of contemporary despotism. Equally informative is the work of Rachel Dressler, which interprets the treatment of sculpted images of the Innocents in Chartres Cathedral as “coded references to Jewish guilt and Muslim vice” (1995: 191). Yet perhaps most thought-provoking is the work of David Kunzle (2001), which focuses on the representation of the Innocents in the paintings of Pieter Bruegel the Elder. Interpreting the artist’s treatment of the theme as a comment on the atrocities committed by the Spanish in the Low Countries in the sixteenth century, Kunzle convincingly demonstrates that Herod is represented specifically as its Governor, the Duque de Alba, who is figured, by implication, as a criminal responsible for acts of religious genocide. It becomes tempting as a result to reconsider the specific formulation of the *Durro Antependium*, where the opposition between Quiricus and his executioners is expressed in terms of somatic similarity, as well as its relationship to later works, which can be classified as products of the late medieval fondness for exploring the thematic and conceptual potential of anti-Semitic and/or Islamophobic stereotypes. While the former reflects by implication on issues of social cohesion, the use/misuse of power, and the enemy within, the latter adopts a more diametrically polarizing approach, encouraging its audiences to associate acts of inhuman barbarity with the Islamic or Judaic other.

The depiction of the mothers of the Innocents can be related to the late medieval culture of somatic piety, and in particular, the fondness for affective emotional engagements with the events of the Passion (Ragusa-Green 1961; McNamer 2010; Robinson 2013; Beresford 2018). In contrast to earlier periods, where Christ is appraised as being lordly and abstract –an omnipotent, inaccessible deity whose triumph over death is as detached as it is incorporeal (Finaldi 2000)– the emphasis of later production falls squarely on questions of empathic engagement, with the memory and experience of suffering and pain encouraging (and, indeed, qualifying) believers to explore procedures of affective mimetic displacement (Scarry 1985; Cohen 1995). The process, which reflects on the relationship between Quiricus and Julitta, is one that pits the doctrinal and theological inevitability of sacrifice against the unbearable tragedy of individual human loss. Encouraged not just perceive Christ’s suffering through the eyes of the Virgin, but to appraise the horrors of the Crucifixion in terms of the emotions that she experienced, the devout could effectively transport themselves through time and space so as to become witnesses at the foot of the cross (Schuler 1992; Shoemaker 2011). By engaging in acts of imaginative, obsessive-compulsive re-creation, they could reach outwards vicariously towards mother and son so as to be able to share in the profoundly human and personal nature of their bond. The natural culmination of this process is the late medieval explosion of interest in Marian art and literature, notably forms such as the *planctus*, in which the Virgin offers a gut-wrenching expression of personal sorrow (Alexiou 1974), and the *pietà*, where she cradles the dead Christ in her arms as if he were still an infant (Dobrzeńiecki 1967; Beresford 2018). The common denominator is that her impassioned gestures and emotions serve in each instance as a catalogue of suggested responses, encouraging believers to appraise her compassion both as a form of *imitatio Christi* and as an overarching metaphor for her instinctively maternal concern for their moral and soteriological destiny. Graphic explorations of horror and pain serve paradoxically in this sense as mechanisms for providing comfort and reassurance for the future (Van Os 1994; Clifton 1997).

The grief of Mary, Rachel, and the mothers of the Innocents is partly a product of the traditionally sexist polarization between passive/emotional/female and active/rational/male. Although historical accounts of mourning discuss how men routinely tore their hair, scratched their faces, ripped their clothes, and gave voice to impassioned expressions of loss for their freshly departed loved ones, the innate association of women with some of the more flamboyant and theatrically performative aspects of grief led to them being classified as ritual mourners capable of operating both individually or as a chorus in the delivery of the ceremonial threnos or lamentation. While male mourners were assumed to grieve with greater reserve, containing their emotions as socially codified constructions of masculinity prescribed, their female equivalents were believed to give voice to more natural and instinctive outpourings of emotion. The distinction, as Galit Hasan-Rokem (2014) adroitly observes, is one that is predicated on the unavoidable linkage between lamentation and motherhood. The separation of the body of the child in its death (or of the mother in her death) is merely a link in a series of separations that begin when the foetus becomes a recognizably separate being within the mother's body. As the other, implanted in her womb, begins to develop an independent pulse and grow inside her, it triggers a series of key physiological transformations. The act of birth, which is often violent, painful, and dangerous, tears one body from another, and, by shattering the notion of unity, it produces a distance that continues to grow. The infant thereafter develops motor skills and articulates its own voice, learning to walk and eventually to separate. Death in this sense is partly a more accentuated form of the natural sequence, an intensification of the potential for total separation inherent in earlier stages of the life cycle, but also a process that is fundamentally different in terms of its finality. For Hasan-Rokem, it is this aspect of death that "pushes the language of laments backwards, to the ideal inseparable phase that indeed barely existed in totality and was lost, piecemeal, during life" (2014: 37). The lamenter, who becomes locked into an ambiguous thought process, refuses to accept the possibility of total separation while embracing the need for it as an expression of the surviving individual's desire to live. The lament can be appraised thus not just as an affirmation that repeats the parting of bodies in birth, but as a celebration of the continuing life of the lamenter's body and a recognition of its transience. Hasan-Rokem adduces, in view of this, that "the narcissism of the erotic-thanatic entanglement of every stage of the mother-child relationship, infuses its aporetic energy into the language of laments" (2014: 37).

Yet Julitta stands conspicuously apart from Mary, Rachel, and the mothers of the Innocents, and by celebrating rather than lamenting the murder of her son, she conforms to a very different archetype of maternity, one that stems ultimately from the depiction of the unnamed mother in 2 Maccabees 7, a figure known variously in the popular tradition as Hannah, Miriam, or Solomonia (Childs 2021: 82-92). The text of Maccabees relates how, in the context of the persecution of the Jews, Antiochus IV Epiphanes arrested a mother and her seven sons and ordered them to eat pork, a law-breaking act that would have compelled them to apostatize. When they refused to do so, he commanded his henchmen to cut out the tongue of the first of the brothers before having him progressively scalped, mutilated, and then roasted in a pan. The pattern was thereafter repeated with the remaining six brothers who, along with their mother, encouraged each other to die nobly and in accordance with ancestral law. The mother, described as a figure who deserves to be remembered with special reverence, watched each of her sons perish in a single day. Yet rather than weep or lament their demise, she bore her suffering bravely, encouraging each of them to focus on the rewards of martyrdom. A point of particular interest concerns how the gospel challenges the conventions of gender by affirming that her thoughts were fired by a manly spirit that encouraged her to disregard the life-giving potential of the womb and instead attribute the breath and life of her sons to the Creator of the Universe. It succeeds thus in subordinating biology to questions of

faith, envisioning God as the true father of humanity, a detail that sheds light not just on Alexander's putative position as Quiricus's surrogate father, but on the parallel between Quiricus and Christ, notably as explored by the *Durro Antependium*. The account concludes by affirming that, after the death of her final son, the mother also died, but since her fate was of secondary importance to the act of witnessing those of her offspring, the specific manner of her demise is not recorded.

The tale of the Maccabean mother served as a conceptual blueprint for subsequent hagiographic production. The most obvious correspondence is with the legend of the Seven Brothers, Sons of St Felicity, which explains how the Roman Prefect, Publius, summoned Felicity and her sons to appear before him before subjecting them one by one to torture and martyrdom. As Felicity looked on, she encouraged her sons to embrace their fate, a detail that for Gregory the Great transformed her into something more than a martyr, a figure who suffered seven times in her own sons and an eighth time in her own body. Just as Felicity once gave her sons to the world through the flesh, she subsequently brought them forth in the spirit so as to deliver them unto God. The version recorded in the *Legenda Aurea*, which differs significantly from the various extant medieval Castilian accounts, affirms that she was unable to see them die without grieving, but since the love within her was so strong, it overcame the natural, instinctive urge to lament.³² Comparable in tone, although more reduced in scope, is the legend of St Sophia and her Three Daughters, which describes how Emperor Hadrian, figuring himself initially, like Alexander, as a putative adoptive father, finds himself so scorned by the girls that he resolves to subject them to a protracted sequence of torments.³³ As Sophia, like Felicity, gazes towards them, she shouts out words of encouragement before later yielding up her soul at their graveside. A common denominator is that, in addition to her own death serving as an event of purely secondary importance, she is classified once again as being more than a martyr, a figure who made the ultimate sacrifice by willingly offering up the souls of her daughters. Related examples, in which parents –as is the case with Julitta– encourage a lone child to embrace the crown of martyrdom, are by no means difficult to find. As St Symphorian, for example, is led away to execution, his mother does not grieve, but instead shouts out words of spirited encouragement, imploring him to focus on the everlasting bliss of the life to come.³⁴ The mother of St Melicon, one of the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste, on the other hand, opts for a more active and dynamic role, taking the battered and brutalized body of her son on her shoulders and chasing after his executioners so that they will burn him along with his fellows. Of particular note is how the version in the *Gran flos sanctorum* approaches the triumph over nature by employing

32. Uniquely in its treatment of the saints, the *Gran flos sanctorum* offers two slightly differing readings for Felicity, with versions in Biblioteca Nacional de España, MS 780 (fols 232^{rb}-33^{rb}) and Real Biblioteca del Monasterio de El Escorial, MS h-II-18 (fols 248^{vb}-49^{vb}). For reasons that remain unclear, neither of them transmits a key section of Voragine's original: "Filiis suos quos carnem suam esse nouerat, sine dolore non poterat morientes uidere, sed erat uis amoris interior que dolorem uinceret carnis" ["She could not see her sons, whom she knew to be her own flesh, dying without pain, but it was an inward force of love that conquered the pain of the flesh"] (Maggioni 1998, 1: 599). A related legend, which does not feature in early Iberian literature, is that of St Symphorosa, who is also reputed to have witnessed the martyrdom of seven sons.

33. The legend of St Sophia does not feature in the *Gran flos sanctorum* but is included in some versions of the *Legenda Aurea*, which comment specifically on the issue of adoption: "Accusantur Adriano et earum est pulchritudine sic allectus, ut eas in filias vellet adoptare, quem ut fimum refutant" ["They are accused by Hadrian, and he is so charmed by their beauty, that he wanted to adopt them as daughters"] (Graesse 1850: 203).

34. "E estonces el juez muy yrado dio sentencia e mandó que fuese muerto Sinphoriano, e como lo llevasen al logar ado lo avían de matar, subió su madre encima del muro de la cibdat e díxole a alta boz: 'Fijo mío, fijo mío, acuérdate de la vida perdurable, e alça los ojos al cielo, e teme Aquel solo que reyna para siempre, ca non te es quitada mas es te mudada en mucha mejoría'" (Biblioteca Nacional de España, MS 12689, fol. 40^{vb}).

the adverb *varonilmente* as a metaphor for the transcendence of maternal instinct.³⁵ It may even be that the Maccabean mother succeeded in inflecting the relationship between married couples, with St Natalia displaying a frenzied determination to ensure that her husband, St Adrian, is martyred before any of his fellows.³⁶

As Joss Childs (2021: 90) recognizes, the tale of the Maccabean mother served not just as an *exemplum* of virtuous child-rearing, but as a model for married women in all aspects of life. In the face of unbearable trials, her calm, steadfast commitment to the pursuit of martyrdom provided an emulatory blueprint for the ordeals experienced by ordinary women. Since early Christian writers were concerned that infant mortality could lead to excessive expressions of mourning or even the temptation to question the will of the divine, she became especially important in modelling balanced and appropriate responses to the deaths of children. Despite suffering internally according to her maternal nature, she remained outwardly staunch –or *varonil*– in her resolve, encouraging her offspring to submit themselves to torture and death so as to progress their souls heavenward. Standing thus as a model of pious behaviour for grieving parents, particularly mothers, she did not lose her warmth and affection, but instead succeeded in sublimating them into the pursuit of a higher spiritual objective. It is partly for this reason that despite offering a remarkably condensed version of events, the *Gran flos sanctorum* devotes almost twice as many words to Julitta's reaction as it does to her martyrdom, which is figured, by implication, as an event of purely secondary importance. Having raised Quiricus to become the perfect Christian martyr –sculpting him, as Childs (2021: 91) notes, into the perfect offering for God– she becomes able to celebrate his ascent into the ranks of the celestial elect, spurning the role of the grief-stricken *mater dolorosa* in order to exult in his triumph before embracing her own martyrological destiny. His death, in this sense, is partly an achievement in its own right, but perhaps more fundamentally, a reward for his mother's selflessness and unrestrained piety. By demonstrating a willingness to abandon her child and consent to his demise, she transcends family ties and lives for God alone, serving as the perfect illustration of the militant evangelical radicalism of Matthew 10: 37–38. The most obvious evidence of her success in subordinating maternity to questions of faith and devotion is that she is regarded as the patron saint of childbirth and of the health of sickly and ailing children (Morse 2013: 189).

In contrast to the fate of Quiricus, which, as we have seen, is the product of a sudden fit of pique, Julitta's martyrdom is envisioned as a sequential –and therefore protracted– process. It becomes important, in view of this, to mark a distinction between narrative and chronological time (Genette 1980), setting the relative speed with which her fate is narrated against the period it would have taken to inflict. Having given thanks and praise for her son's salvation, Julitta is initially sentenced to be flayed alive, a torture that relates her most conspicuously to St Bartholomew, who was divested of the protective covering of the epidermis as a punishment for converting a king and his family to Christianity (Beresford 2020). Although the significance of Julitta's torture is not meaningfully

35. “E como pusiesen los cuerpos de los santos mártires en unas carretas e los levasen a quemar los servidores de Sathanás, vido la madre que dexava a su fijo, creyendo que aún le podrían apartar de la fee de la *chrisiandad* e lo ynclinarian a ofrescer sacreficios a los ydolos, [e] tomólo sobre sus onbr[os] e fuese varonilmente con él en pos de las carretas. E como lo levase la madre sobre el onbro, dio el alma al Señor todopoderoso. E llegando la madre al lugar do los quemavan, lançó el cuerpo de su fijo sobre los otros cuerpos por que en la muerte e en la sepoltura fuese compañero dellos” (Real Biblioteca del Monasterio de El Escorial, MS h-III-22, fol. 534^{ra}). See also Newman (1995: 81).

36. “E temiendo Santa Natalia que se espantaría su marido Sant Adrián de que viesse quebrantar las piernas a los otros mártires que con él eran, rogó a los que ge las avían de quebrantar que las quebrantassen primero a Sant Adrián. E ellos fiziéronlo assí. E desde que le ovieron quebrantado las piernas, cortáronle anbos los pies. E Santa Natalia rogó a Sant Adrián que se dexasse cortar la mano por que se pudiesse ygualar a los otros mártires santos que avían seydo más atormentados. E Sant Adrián fizolo assý, e dio luego el espíritu al Señor” (Real Biblioteca del Monasterio de El Escorial, MS h-II-18, fol. 131^{vb}). For a brief discussion, see Beresford-Twomey (2018: 19–21).

explored in the *Gran flos sanctorum*, its suggestiveness –inasmuch as it transforms her inner core into an external integument capable of mediating contact with the outside world– sheds light not just on the fate of her son, but on the representation of motherhood *per se*. Just as Quiricus was once born into the world, emerging from the protective confines of his mother's womb, the spilling of his brains onto the tribunal steps succeeds in separating the inner from the outer, enabling him to be reborn to an eternity of salvific certainty.

Julitta, likewise, having been skinned like an animal, suffers an irrevocable split between the external façade that once communicated her identity outwards towards the world beyond and the inner core that constituted the essence of her being. As her skin is peeled away and her new self emerges in bloody, foetus-like fashion from within, it produces an ambiguous but definitive rupture in the relationship between subject and object, reflecting by extension on the nature of the liminal, the in-between, and ultimately, the notion of abject embodiment (Kristeva 1982; Grosz 1990; Binski 1996; Miller 1997; Merback 1999). No longer complete in her ontological totality, Julitta is both a pelt of flayed human skin and a body-length wound, an oozing, abject reminder of the liquescent gore of her otherwise hidden interior (Beresford 2020: 142–97). An additional complication is that by subsequently coating her in boiling pitch, Alexander succeeds in furnishing her with a new skin, one that transforms her into a blackened, devil-like creature that would have been barely recognizable as human. She can be appraised accordingly in terms of developments in postcolonial theory, with her new epidermis serving as a catalyst for procedures of specular repudiation and disavowal, a mechanism for iterating all that the pristinely white –and therefore supposedly virtuous– self is not (Bhabha 1994). Her antagonist therefore resolves to end her life by opting for the more traditional approach of cleaving her head from her body, a fate that recalls that of her son, and by implication, the process of childbirth, which effectively ensures that one body becomes two.

Yet the final word –literally– belongs to Quiricus. Having offered an account of the martyrdoms of mother and son, the *Gran flos sanctorum* continues to adhere to the sequential ordering of the version composed by Jacobus de Voragine, reproducing an episode in which the youngster, empowered by the Holy Spirit, engages Alexander in dialogue. This curious addendum, which is in many ways typical of Voragine's rather idiosyncratic approach to source-gathering (Reames 1985; Beresford 2022), succeeds in recontextualizing the loquaciousness of Quiricus –as outlined in the *Acta Apocrypha*– by reinterpreting it in terms of the conservative realism of the versions descended from Theodore's epistle. Rather than a product of precocious natural ability or judicious maternal nurture, the young saint's verbal dexterity is attributed to the power and influence of the Holy Spirit. Alexander, unable to comprehend or countenance the affront, condemns Quiricus to be whipped, a torture attributed in the main body of the narrative to his mother. Yet the more severely the saint is wounded, the more vociferously he professes his faith, inducing Alexander to order that the bodies of mother and son be dismembered and their remains scattered so as to deny them the appropriate rites of burial. The text in this way comes full circle, restoring Quiricus to his traditional position as the centre of narrative interest while relegating his mother, whose role is not developed, to one of disciple-like inferiority.

Given that discussions of the ethics of infanticide tend to focus, as Peter Singer (2013: 260) affirms, on whether the victim “knows what existence is”, it may be that the episode was included so as to afford Quiricus an opportunity to offer a rational and reasoned explanation of the decision to die for his faith. The problem, in essence, is whether infants who are as yet unable to articulate their opinions with clarity and conviction should be classified –as is the case with the Holy Innocents– as true and authentic martyrs, or whether they should be held to account for the beliefs that they

express.³⁷ In this instance, rather than mechanically reproduce his mother's words and values, Quiricus is figured as a *puer senex* who serves as the mouthpiece of the Holy Spirit. The obvious corollary –which chimes with the words of Matthew 10: 37-38– is the prioritization of faith over questions of biology, with the saint's spiritual family regarded as the one true source of counsel. It becomes possible as a result to revisit questions of narrative emphasis and conceptual inversion, reading Quiricus ultimately as a type of Maccabean mother, a figure capable of leading those around him –Julitta included– to an understanding of the folly of paganism and the ineluctable primacy of Christian virtue.³⁸

5 Literary and Visual Culture

An analysis of early Iberian art and literature reveals that the legend of Quiricus and Julitta circulated in two almost entirely incompatible forms. Favoured by medieval artists and their patrons, the version of events outlined in the *Acta Apocrypha* envisions Quiricus as the principal narrative protagonist, while literary accounts such as the *Gran flos sanctorum* focus predominantly instead on the experiences of Julitta, thereby adhering to the doctrinally licit emphasis of Theodore's epistle. The clarity of the distinction between the two is undermined in part, as we have seen, by the transmission of Voragine's narrative addendum, which interpolates some of the spirit of the earlier account into the latter, and in part by medieval Iberian artworks, which introduce elements of Theodore's version into representations inspired by the *Acta Apocrypha*. The result is that it becomes almost impossible to appraise the saints in stable or even unitary terms. The early Quiricus is active, dynamic, and loquacious –a militantly evangelizing proselytizer capable of vanquishing his foes with the power of his rhetoric– while later incarnations conform to more traditional expectations of decorum by depicting him as a figure who responds instinctively to the sight of his mother's suffering by scratching and then biting her antagonist. A third Quiricus, who sits somewhere between the two, is characterized as an infant who becomes capable of reasoned argument because he has been empowered to do so by the Holy Spirit. Julitta, likewise, is not a coherent or stable figure, but one that can only realistically be appraised as the sum of her parts. Her earliest incarnation inverts the traditional parent-child relationship inasmuch as she learns from, and is inspired by, the suffering and reassurance of her son. Conversely, in later accounts, she is reformulated so as to become the principal protagonist and centre of narrative attention, a surrogate Maccabean mother who joyfully sacrifices her offspring as a test of faith before embracing her own death, an event relegated to a position of purely secondary importance. It becomes clear as a result that despite Theodore's attempt to re-write and thereby suppress his original, his endeavours were no means successful. In fact, rather than simply reorient the legend by bringing it into line with the demands of orthodoxy, he succeeded in splitting it into distinct branches, each with its own unique appeal.

37. As Childs (2021: 73-74) affirms, "By portraying children as speaking and behaving like adults, these martyrdoms establish them as legitimate martyrs and demonstrate the power of God through the reversal of the 'natural' hierarchy between adults and children". See also Horn (2006: 316).

38. As Childs (2021: 101) affirms, "Cyricus is the moral authority in this parent-child relationship, able to parlay his piety into assistance from the Holy Spirit for his faltering mother. He takes the role of a Maccabean mother, encouraging Julitta to endure torture and turning to God for assistance when his encouragement alone is not enough". She adds that the "reversal in the expected mother-child relationship is made clear here: Cyricus is the teacher and parent, who is responsible for the moral formation and protection of Julitta, the student and child".

The earliest of the two, the *Acta Apocrypha*, has been explicitly cast as the narrative of the gullible and uneducated majority, a grouping duped by a heretical plot that sought to mock the Christian fondness for embellishment and exaggeration by presenting its protagonists in an eminently implausible light (Childs 2021: 105-06). The latter, in contrast, has been envisioned as the unvarnished truth, a reliable eye-witness account preserved in the oral tradition by the Lycaonian aristocracy and interpreted thereafter as a factual record of events. A key issue concerns the role of the miraculous and the extent to which the later text distanced itself from the fear of ridicule by excising the fantastical and reshaping its content so as to conform to the more standardized and disciplined approach that by that time had become the compositional norm. Yet the later version, Childs (2021: 108) affirms, is not simply the early text with the more unbelievable miracles removed, but “an almost entirely different narrative, with a new protagonist, narrative structure, and primary theme”. In the *Acta Apocrypha*, the focus of the legend falls on Quiricus, who engages Alexander and the Devil in debate before receiving praise directly from God and then guiding his mother through the protracted process of martyrdom, encouraging her to eschew fear and the concomitant dangers of apostasy by observing and then imitating his example. The inversion of the parent-child relationship, which shatters a hierarchy that had been firmly established across the ancient world, characterizes Quiricus as a type of Maccabean mother, and Julitta, as a mere disciple. It is for this reason that the text, even at a time that allowed for experimentation and the inclusion of fantastical elements, became so disbelieved and disliked by the forces of devotional orthodoxy.

The later version, on the other hand, draws attention to Quiricus's status as a child but never undermines the cultural expectations that accompany such behaviour. In contrast to the *Acta Apocrypha*, where the young saint is questioned separately from his mother, the *Gran flos sanctorum* describes how Julitta, having been arrested, attends the trial while cradling her son in child-like fashion in her arms. Alexander, having no immediate plans to prosecute or punish Quiricus, sets him on his lap so that he can focus exclusively on her fate. A powerful criminal adversary is transformed in this sense into a distressed, weeping infant, who instinctively averts his gaze before scratching and then biting his antagonist. For Childs (2021: 109), it is precisely this lack of control over passions that theologians such as St Jerome, St John Chrysostom, and St Augustine regarded as the core characteristic of children. As yet incapable of reason or rational speech, they were envisioned as creatures who were unable to resist their instincts, and so it was only by means of the education provided by their parents that they would be able to develop and become fully moral beings. By in this way emphasizing the notion of dependence, later literary texts restored the traditional hierarchical balance between parents and their offspring while simultaneously re-casting Quiricus in the image of the Holy Innocents. The underlying assumption is that, rather than make the independent, rational choice to die in the name of Christ, he is holy because he was virtuous and suffered unjustly at the hands of his oppressor. His mother, in contrast, re-appraised in the image of the Maccabean mother, joyfully celebrates his demise, safe in the knowledge that he has ascended to heaven before her. Despite its obvious conceptual interest, her martyrdom becomes in this way significantly less important than that of her son.

The fact that the *Acta Apocrypha* barely circulated in the West can be taken in part as evidence of the success of Theodore's version in attempting to replace and thereby suppress its original. Branded as excessive, absurd, and nonsensical, the text was rejected by the forces of ecclesiastical authority, and it is perhaps unsurprising in this respect that the only surviving manuscript, edited by Daniel Papebroch in 1701, has subsequently been lost. Yet as the number of extant artworks suggests, the success of Theodore's epistle should not be measured purely in terms of its literary dissemination. Far from an extinct piece of apocrypha, the earlier portrait of Quiricus and Julitta

continued to provide audiences with sources of fascination and devotional stimulation, regaling them, as is the case of other saints, with graphic depictions of corporeal mutilation and the supreme achievements of faith. It becomes important accordingly to reflect not just on the nature of its excesses, as critics have done, but on the reasons why the sanitized version, divested of its miracles and the majority of its tortures, failed to compete (at least in the popular visual tradition) with its illustrious antecedent – a point that has been almost completely overlooked.

One of the principal reasons, which raises implications for the distinction between art and literature more broadly, is the fact that in contrast to acts of torture, which are depicted with routine efficiency in forms such as the medieval altarpiece, the joy of a mother on celebrating the death of her infant son must inevitably have provided artists and commissioning patrons with an awkward, if not inscrutable dilemma. In addition to the problem of translating Julitta's triumph into the spatial dynamics of artistic composition – presumably with her hands raised jubilantly to the heavens or clasped triumphantly together in prayer while the mutilated body of her son lies shattered and broken on the tribunal steps before her – it is by no means certain how the active celebration of child murder would have been received at an extra-diegetic level. Rather than envision Julitta as a resilient and implacable ally, she could potentially have been misinterpreted and read as a callously partisan member of Alexander's entourage, a figure without morals or scruples in applauding the brutal slaying of an infant. A related consideration concerns the reaction of parents, many of whom would have suffered the agony of losing their offspring to high rates of infant mortality, and the concomitant role of topics such as the Massacre of the Innocents, which would inevitably have served as a more effective catalyst for palliative outpourings of empathy and communal solidarity.

Although the culture of somatic piety would have been well known to believers in the Middle Ages, particularly in the form of texts such as the *Meditationes Vitae Christi* (Ragusa-Green 1961) and the preaching of orders such as the Franciscans and the Dominicans (Robson 2006), the attempt to refocus the legend away from Quiricus and towards an exploration of Julitta's physical and emotional experiences, must inevitably be classified – at least as far as visual production is concerned – as a failure. In contrast to Sts Felicity or Sophia, whose joyful reaction to child sacrifice makes no impression on early Iberian art, Julitta appears in visual form, but never as a mother who actively celebrates the death of her son. The same is true of the mothers of Sts Symphorian and Melicon, whose reaction is comparably jubilant, as well as St Natalia, who, as we have seen, enthusiastically encourages her husband to pursue the path of martyrdom. In fact, Quiricus, the most popular component of the mother/son pairing, remained the centre of cultic interest (a factor most patently corroborated by his position as sole patron of churches and religious houses) while Julitta, whose sacrifice was by no means as valorized as that of Rachel, Mary, or the mothers of the Innocents, often disappeared correspondingly from view.

Although contemporary debates concerning questions of realism and credulity in the depiction of children made some believers apprehensive about embracing a narrative that, as Childs (2021: 121) affirms, “exalts the moral autonomy and spiritual power of a child over his mother”, it remains clear, by the same token, that others were by no means persuaded of the cogency or practicality of a tale in which a woman actively celebrates the murder of her own son. Despite official condemnation, stemming ultimately from Pope Zosimus's reservations concerning the growth and development of their cult, Quiricus's precocious, preternatural achievements continued to inspire artists and their patrons, leading them to focus on his suffering, and in some cases, abilities such as his unparalleled proselytizing acumen. The most obvious example, as we have seen, is Garcia de Benavari's *Retable de sant Quirze i santa Julita* (fig. 14), where the young saint preaches to and then converts his fellow prisoners. The corollary is that while art and literature are different forms, and are generally studied by different schools, each with their own distinctive agendas and historical traditions, the

legend of Quiricus and Julitta demonstrates the perilousness of disaggregating the verbal from the visual and analysing either textual or pictorial production in a critical vacuum. In contradistinction to contemporary academic practices, which have artificially compartmentalized the ways in which scholars have approached the broader cultural legacy of the Middle Ages, contemporary audiences would have experienced little difficulty in switching between art and literature, or even history and theology, in the search for enlightenment and inspiration. A critical position that fails to account for the influence of such a wide range of stimuli will almost certainly be destined to reveal only a small –and potentially misleading– part of the equation. It becomes important accordingly to adopt a more holistic and nuanced approach towards questions of interpretation, reaching across traditional disciplinary boundaries so as to gain a full and proper insight into the richness and complexity of medieval production. The legend serves in this sense as a test case for the elaboration of critical approaches to hagiography, and indeed, of devotional themes more broadly, which, in view of their centrality to everyday patterns of observance, were inevitably translated between different forms and media, but not necessarily in the same narrative form.



Fig. 16. *Quiricus Wounding Alexander's Face*, from the *Retablo de san Quirico y santa Julita*, sixteenth century. Villamelendro de Valdavia, Iglesia de la Asunción.

Photo by Andrew M. Beresford CC-BY.

To argue that Theodore was successful in challenging a legend that could potentially have offered a dangerously misleading or even heretical impression of Christian virtue is a fact that, in terms of literature, cannot be doubted. Yet by engaging in a process of textual cleansing and thereby transforming Julitta into the principal narrative focus, he succeeded simultaneously in scrubbing his version of visual interest, producing a largely derivative and conceptually insipid account of her position as a surrogate Maccabean mother, a role already long since occupied by others –and with a considerably greater level of success. In contrast to the gamut of exciting and imaginative

tortures inflicted on Julitta's son, her own suffering, which could potentially have lent itself, as is the case with the flaying of St Bartholomew, to a richly distinctive and engaging sequence of pictorial representation, provided no obvious interest for artists and their patrons, whose thoughts remained with Quiricus. Notable in this respect is the left-hand panel of the predella of the fifteenth-century *Retable de sant Quirze i santa Julita*, which offers an image of St Bartholomew replete with a blood-stained flaying knife in his right hand and a pelt of flayed human skin in his left. The fact that he –rather than Julitta– is included in this context demonstrates that, despite the severity of the torture inflicted upon her, she was unable to displace him in the popular imagination as the saint who was flayed.

A partial exception to the prioritization of Quiricus over Julitta can be seen in the representation of the whipping, which, despite forming part of a limited number of early Iberian altarpieces, is approached principally as the spark that catalyses the youngster's attack on Alexander –the event that directly precipitates his own martyrdom. A notable example is given in a sixteenth-century panel from the Museo Diocesano in Palencia where Julitta, stripped to the waist, is whipped by an executioner while Quiricus, cradled in Alexander's lap, watches on from a distance while raising his hands upwards towards his face. Yet perhaps most thought-provoking is the treatment of the episode in the sixteenth-century altarpiece from the Iglesia de la Asunción in Villamelendro de Valdavia (fig. 16), which restores the traditional primacy of the legend by depicting Quiricus in the process of wounding Alexander's face with his fingernails while his mother simply stands and watches, her own torture –and the essential narrative reason for her son's reaction– eliminated from the pattern of cause and effect. It becomes clear as a result that although Theodore's re-writing succeeded in imposing the imprimatur of orthodoxy on subsequent literary production, it failed spectacularly to stifle –and may indeed have augmented– the visual popularity of Quiricus's cult and the position of the *Acta Apocrypha* in the collective memory of early Iberian society.

6 Appendix

Quiricus and Julitta in the *Gran flos sanctorum*¹

[Biblioteca Nacional de Madrid MS 780 fol. 195^{vb}] Aquí comienza la vida de los santos mártires² Quirico e Julita su madre

Quirico quiere dezir 'omne que busca arco'. E aun Quirico puede ser [fol. 196^{ra}] dicho 'fortaleza negra'. E aun Quirico quiere dezir 'lança e silla'. Ca Sant Quirico fue arco inclinado por humildat, e fue fuerte en el sufrimiento de los tormentos, e negro despreciando a sí mesmo, e lança para guerrear al enemigo, e sylla conviene saber de Dios, porque en él fazia morada el Señor por gracia, e la gracia cumplía en él lo que fallescía a la hedat. E Julita quiere dezir 'vida ayudante', porque ovo vida spiriual, e porque³ ella fue razón a muchos de conoscer la verdat.

E Sant Quirico fue fijo de aquesta⁴ noble dueña de la cibdat de Yconio que avía nonbre Julita. E esta noble dueña fuese a morar a la cibdat de Tarso de Cilicia⁵, e llevó consigo a un su fijo, que era de hedat de tres años e avía nonbre Quirico, por temor de la persecución. E fue presa en la cibdat de Tarso e levada delante un adelantado que avía nonbre Alexandre, e levava a su fijo Quirico en los braços. E veyéndola prender dos servientas que tenía, dieron a fuyr e dexáronla. E [fol. 196^{rb}] el adelantado tomó al niño en los braços e mandó a Santa Julita que ofresciese sacrificio a los ydolos, e ella non lo queriendo fazer, mandóla açotar muy duramente con nervios crudos.

E el niño veyendo açotar a la madre, llorava amargamente e dava grandes gritos. E asentóse el adelantado, e puso en sus rodillas al niño, e començólo a besar e a falagar. E el niño despreciava e aborrescía los sus⁶ afálogos del adelantado, e apartava la cara e rascañávale en ella con las uñas, e oteava a la madre e llorava e gritava como sy dixiese que era christiano. E el adelantado teniéndole asý en las rodillas, e el niño sacudiéndose por se partir dél, diole un bocado. E el adelantado movido a saña, lançó abaxo el niño por las gradas de la silla ado estava asentado, e descalabróse el niño malamente, e saliéronle los sesos, e dio el espíritu al Señor.

E a Santa Julita ve | yendo [fol. 196^{va}] muerto a su fijo, e que era ydo delante della al reyno de los cielos, començóse a alegrar e a fazer gracias a Dios. E veyendo esto el adelantado, mandóla desollar, e echar encima della pez retida, e después descabeçar.

E en una ystoria se lee que el niño Sant Quirico se confesava ser christiano, e despreciava las amenazas e fálogos del tirano, e fablava en él el Espíritu Santo, aunque non avía hedat para fablar. E como le preguntase el adelantado quién le avía enseñado, respondióle Sant Quirico e dixo: 'Maravíllome de tu necedat, ca como me veas de tan pequeña hedat, que aun non he tres años

1. Scribal abbreviations have been resolved and are indicated by the use of italics. The random distribution of *i/j* and *u/v* has been regularized, with *i* and *u* used for vocalic, and *j* and *v* for consonantal values. Word initial *ff*, *rr*, and *ss* (used haphazardly) are transcribed as *f*, *r*, and *s*, while Tironian signs and *et* are transcribed as *e*. The consonant *ç* is retained before *a*, *o*, and *u*, but is otherwise transcribed as *c*. Accents follow modern practice, except for those that have been added to medieval forms such as *só* and *y* to avoid confusion. Word division follows modern practice, with the exception of elided compounds such as *deste* and *quel* and enclitic compounds such as *mandóle*, *escalentáronlo*, and *preguntóles*. Punctuation has been supplied and capitalization altered to conform to modern practice. Changes of folio are indicated in brackets, with superscript *ra/vb* and *va/vb* designating recto and verso column divisions. A vertical bar (|) indicates a change of folio within a single word. Corrected readings are listed in footnotes.

2. mártires: mar mártires *MS*.

3. que (added in *supra*): *MS*.

4. aquesta (struck through): *MS*.

5. Cilicia: Cicilia *MS* (cf. Latin *Cilicie*).

6. sus (struck through): *MS*.

complidos, ¿por qué me preguntas *quién* me enseñó la sabiduría *que non* es de los *omnes* mas de Dios?

E como le *mardase* açotar el adelantado, llamava él *segunt* podía e dezía *que* era *christiano*, e tanto rescebía mayores fuerças entre las penas *quanto* más se confesava la fe *christiana*.

E aun dize en *aquella* ystoria *que* el adelantado *mardó* desmenbrar a Santa Julita e a [fol. 196^{vb}] Sant Quirico su fijo, e derramar los miembros por diversas partes por que *non* los enterrasen los *christianos*, e cogió los miembros el ángel, e los allegó en un lugar, e los enterraron de noche los *christianos*.

E en *tiempo* de Constantino el Grande, biviendo aun una de las sirvientas de Santa Julita, e aviendo paz la iglesia, fueron demostrados los sus cuerpos a⁷ *aquella* sirvienta, e fueron avidos del pueblo en grand reverencia, a honrra e gloria del *Nuestro* Redemptor, el qual bive e reyna con el Padre e con el Espíritu Santo por sienpre. AMÉN.

7. a: de *MS*.

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