

Nuns' Bodily and Sensory Experiences. The Rituals of the Holy Week in Lichtenthal, Between Shared Performance and Individual Meditative Practices

In Medieval Europe, the Holy Week was the most important and solemn period of the liturgical year, which implied highly spectacularized performances and the active involvement of different actors. As well as being performed in parish churches and cathedrals, Holy Week rites were also accomplished in male and female communities, according to peculiar norms and customs. As far as Germany is concerned, scholars such as Hamburger, Koldau, Walker Bynum, Muschiol and Meham have already shown the distinctive features that rites in nunneries – that is, *for* nuns and *by* nuns - had.

This paper aims to develop this further by incorporating notions established in the field of sensory studies, together with methods and tools developed in visual and material culture studies. It will focus on the nunnery of Lichtenthal which, despite being a well-known case-study, is still under explored in respect to some crucial aspects. Bringing together and examining comparatively diverse materials, including the architectural spaces, works of art, and liturgical books, while also reappraising the aristocratic lineage of the community, the paper will contribute to advance the study of religious practices in nunneries within the broader topic of rituals of gender staging and performance in the Middle Ages.

In order to reach my goal, I will focus on the bodily and multi-sensorial involvement of nuns in the ritual, both as a community and as individuals. I will establish the crucial importance that movements in time and space had, tracing an ideal itinerary based on the actions performed by the nuns to stage their encounter with the Divine. Moreover, I will address the crucial dichotomy, often neglected, that existed between moments of intense bodily and sensorial stimulation over the ritual and silent pauses for individual meditation, which implied a dramatic shift in the reception, perception, and agency of the rite.