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Matter Matters

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It has long been taken for granted that medieval relics activated all manner of sensual encounters. When Hugh, the bishop of Lincoln and an eager collector of relics, came to the Abbey of Fécamp, he was allowed to see and touch a relic—the arm bone, to be precise—of St Mary Magdalene. When he put it to his lips to kiss it, he undoubtedly inhaled its odour; when he chomped down on the bone and bit off two pieces, he added a gustatory experience to the visual, the haptic, and the olfactory. The auditory background for this somewhat unseemly event was supplied by the clamouring Norman monks who witnessed Hugh's act and recognized their magnanimous gesture as a grave mistake.¹

This act, however, both as it is described in Hugh's *Vita* and as gleaned from the vast array of medieval sources on relic veneration, stands witness to a series of emotional encounters as well. Hugh's visit to the Magdalene's relics suggests anticipation and curiosity, while his act betrays an aggressive determination, a longing to possess, and therefore either greed or awe or both: before resorting to the indecorous mastication, he first tried to break off a finger with his hands. The monks of Fécamp, understandably, were outraged, comparing Hugh's act to that of a common dog. Their confrontation with Hugh hints at an entire smorgasbord of emotions: they were agitated, indignant, infuriated, puzzled, distressed, astonished, bewildered, and clearly troubled, perhaps humiliated. St Hugh, his devotional fervour gratified, offered an answer that was cool and condescending, indicating not a trace of guilt or shame, just self-satisfaction: he did nothing wrong, he said, for every day during the Mass, he touched with his teeth and fingers a much more important relic, the Body of Christ under the Eucharistic species. 'Why', he asked, 'should I not venture to treat in the same way the bones of the saints?' Perhaps if the Norman ecclesiastics had known that the head of St Hugh would be stolen and thrown away in a field in 1346, they would have been similarly satisfied.

This was the twelfth century; throughout the next hundred years the Magdalene's relics multiplied. Susan Haskins drolly suggests that 'Mary Magdalene had, it seems, left behind at least five corpses, in addition to many whole arms and smaller

¹ Adam of Eynsham, *Life of St Hugh of Lincoln*, ed. Decima L. Douie and Dom Hugh Fraser, vol. II (London: OSB, 1962), 169–70.



Fig. 2.1. Reliquary of Mary Magdalene, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Tuscany, Italy. Gilded copper, gilded silver, rock crystal, *verre églomisé*. Dimensions: Overall: $22 \times 9\frac{3}{8} \times 7\frac{5}{16}$ in. ($55.9 \times 23.8 \times 20.2$ cm); Roundel: $3\frac{3}{8}$ in. (8.6 cm); Rock crystal vessel: $4\frac{5}{16} \times 2\frac{3}{16} \times 1\frac{1}{8}$ in. ($10.9 \times 5.5 \times 4.1$ cm).

pieces that could not be accounted for.² The focus of this essay is a late medieval Tuscan reliquary now at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which allegedly holds the Magdalene's tooth (Fig. 2.1).³ The reliquary is visually stunning. The tooth sits on an iron pin inside an egg-shaped crystal, clearly reused, judging by an incongruous ridge that runs across the middle. It is topped by a small silver plaque inscribed, in niello, 'D[E].S[ANTA].M[A]RI[A].E.MADALENE'.⁴ The crystal is held by delicate gilt leaves and framed by elegant microarchitecture. A pair of two-storeyed arcaded towers encloses four figures, two angels and two saints in Franciscan garb, the latter

² Susan Haskins, *Mary Magdalen: Myth and Metaphor* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co, 1993), 99.

³ On the reliquary, see Margaret English Frazer, 'Medieval Church Treasuries', *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin [MMAB]* 43.3 (1985–6): 51, 54, fig. 61; *The Way to Heaven: Relic Veneration in the Middle Ages*, exhibition catalogue, ed. Henk van Os (Amsterdam: Nieuwe Kerk, 2000), 152–5; Stefano Carboni et al., 'Ars Vitraria: Glass in the Metropolitan Museum of Art', *MMAB* 59.1 (2001): 36; and *Treasures of Heaven: Saints, Relics, and Devotion in Medieval Europe*, exhibition catalogue, ed. Martina Bagnoli, Holger A. Klein, C. Griffith Mann, and James Robinson (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), #110, 196–7.

⁴ Niello is a black amalgam of silver, copper, sulphur, and lead, used to fill in engraved lines on a metal surface.

usually identified as Saint Francis and Saint Bernardino. Above the crystal, propped on a graceful base, is a *verre églomisé*—reverse-glass painting—medallion. It, too, holds relics, accompanied by cedulae, or inscriptions that identify the contents. The medallion confirms the connection of the reliquary to the Franciscan order: flanking the central Crucifixion are half-length images of Saint Francis and Saint Clare, he pictured opposite Saint John, she opposite the Virgin. Above and below the Crucifixion are half-length images of Saints Peter and Paul. On the other side of the medallion, a scene of the Nativity is depicted. The *verre églomisé* disc, which dates from the fourteenth century, is further topped by a cross.

While this relic—along with its container—does not have such a storied history as that of the arm in Fécamp, it taps into the same network of feelings. This chapter will explore the possible access points of this network in order to suggest what types of medieval emotional communities cohered around such a reliquary and its contents.⁵ In attending to specific visual aspects of the object—its translucent crystal that simultaneously reveals and obfuscates the enclosed tooth, its fragile microarchitecture that allows one to glimpse the figures hidden within, the affective imagery on its *verre églomisé* disc that indicates the use of the reliquary by a Franciscan community—I will discuss the reliquary and its contents as the loci of emotional responses, both pictured and elicited, suggested and guided.

Rather than rehearse a rich history of scholarship on pilgrimage and relic veneration, I want to consider the reliquary not just as something wrought by human hands, but as something that works itself *upon* the beholder: in other words, not just as a recipient of human agency but as an agent in human experience itself. Such a reciprocal relationship between the material lives of objects and emotional lives of viewers has been worried in many different methodologies, from Object-Oriented Ontology—which, to borrow from Ian Bogost, ‘puts things at the center of the study [of existence]’—to Thing Theory.⁶ The latter in particular is concerned with the ambiguity of thing-ness: ‘beyond the grid of intelligibility’, as Bill Brown writes, and ‘outside the order of objects’.⁷ This ambiguity inheres in the very questions about agentic materiality: how do objects structure, prod, and develop our emotional lives? What happens when non-feeling things convey and form feeling? Art historians have recently turned to Alfred Gell’s posthumously published *Art and Agency*, which foregrounds objects as active social agents, not inert things that passively await aesthetic, or even semiotic, scrutiny.⁸ But many of us, it seems to me, have been doing this all along, and the current material turn in art history is not so much a turn but rather a stepping out of the aesthetic closet of those of us inclined towards an anti-essentialist view of *stuff* and of its very stuff-ness. What interests me here is the agentic power of the relic–reliquary ensemble—power both

⁵ See Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006) for the development of this concept.

⁶ Ian Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology, or What It’s Like to Be a Thing* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2012); see also Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), on a sociology of associations, ‘a type of connection between things that are not themselves social’, 5.

⁷ Bill Brown, ‘Thing Theory’, *Critical Inquiry* 28 (2001): 1–16; 5.

⁸ Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

inherent and attributed—to exert emotional pressures and incite emotional encounters: what Jane Bennett calls ‘an energetic vitality inside... things’—in her example, a dead rat, a stick of wood, a plastic glove, and a bottle cap; in my example, a yellowed tooth, painted glass, gilded metal, and a piece of crystal.⁹ These things—these ostensibly lifeless things—through a rich associative network become active actors in the theatre of their beholders’ affective existence: they unsettle, ignite, disturb. This is not only a medieval phenomenon. In describing his depression, a long-time patient of Stanford psychiatrist Karl Deisseroth said recently, referring to an object he saw on the doctor’s desk: ‘that piece of paper. It bothers me in some unimaginable fashion.’¹⁰ How might an old tooth encased in crystal bother its viewers?

EMOTIONS AND THE MAGDALENE

It is, perhaps, an understatement to say that Mary Magdalene’s body—a beautiful body in which pleasure and penitence so irresistibly combined—proved to be bothersome in the extreme, and that the flesh of few saints has provoked as many sensual and emotional encounters as that of the Magdalene. Her corporeal presence was made vivid throughout the late medieval devotional network that extended from theological literature to her numerous relics that triggered, as we have seen already, passionate responses.¹¹ Jacobus de Voragine’s *Golden Legend*, for example, stresses the saint’s demonstrative nature by providing an extraordinary narrative about the governor of the province where Mary Magdalene landed with her entourage of holy men and women after their exile from Judaea. In particular, the Dominican friar dwells on the Magdalene’s bouts of anger during the saint’s apparitions to the governor and his wife, provoked by their refusal to feed and shelter her companions.¹² First, the Magdalene comes to the woman and threatens her with the wrath of God; she subsequently appears to them both ‘shaking with anger, her face afire as if the whole house were burning’ [‘fremens et irata vultu igneo, ac si tota domus arderet’].¹³ Her anger is articulated through insults: she calls the governor a ‘tyrant’, a ‘limb of your father Satan’, and ‘enemy of the cross of Christ’ [‘tyranne’, ‘membrum patris tuae Satanae’, ‘crucis Christi inimice’], and

⁹ Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 5.

¹⁰ John Colapinto, ‘Lighting the Brain’, *New Yorker*, 18 May 2015, 82.

¹¹ On Mary Magdalene’s cult, see Victor Saxer, *Le Culte de Marie Madeleine en Occident: des origines à la fin du Moyen Âge*, 2 vols. (Paris: Clavreuil, 1959) and *Le Dossier vézelien de Marie Madeleine: invention et translation des reliques en 1265–1267: contribution à l’histoire du culte de la sainte à Vézelay à l’apogée du Moyen Âge* (Brussels: Société des bollandistes, 1975).

¹² On medieval concepts of anger, see Barbara Rosenwein, ed., *Anger’s Past: The Social Uses of an Emotion in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998). The burning quality of the Magdalene’s anger likely has to do with the humoral theory that equated anger/wrath with an abundance of heat.

¹³ Here and further original text from Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda aurea: vulgo historia Lombardica dicta ad optimorum librorum fidem*, ed. Johann Georg Theodor Grässe (Leipzig: Librariae Arnoldianae, 1850), quotes from 409–13. For English translation, see *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, trans. William Granger Ryan, intro. Eamon Duffy (Oxford and Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 374–83, quotes from 377–9.

refers to his spouse as a ‘viper of a wife’ [‘cum vipera conjugue tua’]. Her two future converts also overflow with emotion: the governor ‘shakes in fear’ [‘pavere non desino’], and both he and his wife are described as being ‘in distress’ [‘de causa suspiranti’]. After the Magdalene acquiesces to their pleas and succeeds in asking Christ to grant the pair a son, a truly fantastic story ensues, as the suspicious husband desires to go to Rome and seek out Peter in order to confirm the Magdalene’s stories about Christ, while the pregnant wife heatedly refuses to let him go alone [‘Absit; te enim recedente recedam, te veniente veniam, te quiescente quiescam’].

Inasmuch as this narrative is meant to define the figure of the Magdalene in the *Golden Legend*, it is striking for the astonishing array of emotions it recounts and is meant to evoke. As it begins in the throes of passionate interactions, so it ends with them. On board a ship, the woman goes into labour and dies while giving birth to her child; the governor—now called a pilgrim—is aggrieved, the sailors are mad, the infant is distressed. At this juncture Jacobus himself lapses into something of a wailing lamentation: ‘Ah, what a pity! The infant is born, he lives, and has become his mother’s killer! He may as well die since there is no one to give him nourishment to keep him alive!’ [‘Proh dolor! Et natus est infans vivus et matricida effectus, mori eum convenit, cum non sit, qui vitae tribuat alimentum’]. Unaccountably, the man persuades the sailors to let him leave the woman and the child on a rocky shore, where he completes a furious rant against the Magdalene and proceeds to Rome; there, he meets Peter, who takes him to Jerusalem. On his way back, the pilgrim stops at the very same shore where he abandoned his dead wife and the infant only to find his offspring alive and happy, his wife’s breast flowing with milk, and his wife indeed not really dead but just awakening from an enchanted kind of sleep that allowed her, in spirit, to journey to Jerusalem along with her husband. The two return to their native Marseilles, appropriately, in tears [‘cum lacrimis’]. Emotions run high.

As its moniker implies, Jacobus’ compendium was a European bestseller: it was as good as gold. Originally written as a preaching aid, the *Golden Legend* surpassed in popularity all of its rival collections. Nearly a thousand manuscript copies are extant in Latin, and about five hundred manuscripts survive that translate the entirety or at least some part of the text into a host of European vernaculars. With the advent of printing, the popularity of the *Legenda Aurea* trumped that of the Bible, with at least sixty-nine vernacular editions and eighty-seven Latin editions printed before 1500.¹⁴ The Magdalene, in general, was dear to the Dominican order. The profusion of her relics led to contentions over authenticity, which generated discreditable—and rather emotional—gossip, as when the Dominicans of Saint-Maximin Abbey in Provence, who claimed to possess the body of the Magdalene, circulated a story about the shrine in Lausanne, which ostensibly owned a piece of this body. It is a story of demonic possession, always a good read. A man came to the Lausanne shrine, claimed the Provençal Dominicans, to

¹⁴ Specifically, for the editions produced in the 1400s, see Robert-Francis Seybolt, ‘Fifteenth-Century Editions of the *Legenda aurea*’, *Speculum* 21.3 (1946): 327–38; briefly discussed in Duffy, ‘Introduction’, in *The Golden Legend*, xii, who points to Alain Boureau’s entry ‘Golden Legend’, in *Encyclopedia of the Middle Ages*, ed. André Vauchez (Paris: Cerf, 2000), 620–1 for further bibliography.

be rid of the demon that possessed him, a feat to be accomplished by the sacristan with the help of Mary Magdalene's relic. But the minute the friar began the process, the devil loudly announced that the exorcism will be useless: 'I tell you, you are lying, because that is not the body or relic of Mary Magdalene, so I am not leaving this man of yours!'¹⁵ The story was intended to accomplish at least two things: to divert the pilgrimage from Lausanne to Provence by disputing the efficacy of a rival relic, and to humiliate the monks of Vézelay who maintained that they had the real body of the Magdalene—and who originally gave a piece of this body to the monastery in Lausanne. As an aside, it is worth mentioning that while Bishop Hugh's attempt to gnaw off a piece of Mary's hand was not a theft *per se*—saints were *pars pro toto*, whole in each fragment; their grace, to borrow from Theodoret, the fifth-century bishop of Cyrhus, was undivided even when their bodies were—Saint-Maximin's Dominicans attempted a true robbery: a robbery of legitimacy, which would result in a loss of status and in a steady flow of



Fig. 2.2. The Skull Reliquary of St Mary Magdalene, Crypte de la Basilique Sainte Marie Madeleine, Saint-Maximin-la-Sainte-Baume, France. Photo: courtesy of Paroisse Saint-Maximin.

¹⁵ See Jacqueline Sclafer, 'Iohannes Gobo Senior O.P. *Liber miraculorum B. Mariae Magdaleneae*', *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum* 63.84 (1993): 114–206; 201–3, translated and discussed in Katherine Ludwig Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen: Preaching and Popular Devotion in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 330.

income for their rivals.¹⁶ Perhaps because her body was a hotly contested site, the Magdalene's relics were put ostentatiously on display. These days, the basilica of Saint-Maximin-la-Sainte-Baume keeps her skull in a transparent vitrine affixed to a golden statue with a removable face (Fig. 2.2). In the Sanctuary of Mary Magdalene, a chapel built inside a grotto at Sainte-Baume, her bones are encased in rock crystal.

EMOTIONS AND DEVOTION

Dominicans may have squabbled over the saint's body in a highly expressive manner, but in their love of the penitent sinner they were arguably surpassed by the Franciscans, who also collected the Magdalene's relics, and who glorified Mary, along with her emotional excesses, in both text and image. At San Francesco in Assisi, the Magdalene has her own chapel, with the narrative of her life painted by Giotto and workshop; at the Guidalotti-Rinuoccini Chapel, in the Florentine Santa Croce, a Magdalene cycle is included alongside scenes of the Virgin Mary's childhood (Fig. 2.3).¹⁷ Saint Francis, who himself was seen as the second Magdalene, enjoined hermits to follow the Magdalene's example; both saints had the same liturgy used for their feasts.¹⁸ In particular, Franciscan texts stress the emotive nature of the Magdalene's conversion. Already in the thirteenth century, Jacopone da Todi wrote in praise of the saint: 'And I, said Magdalen / Threw myself at his feet, / Where I made a great gain, / Where I purged my sins. / Nail me to his feet / And never let me rise again.'¹⁹ The famous devotional guidebook for a Poor Clare, *Meditations*

¹⁶ See Patrick J. Geary, *Furta Sacra: Thefts of Relics in the Central Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990); Scott B. Montgomery, *St. Ursula and the Eleven Thousand Virgins of Cologne: Relics, Reliquaries and the Visual Culture of Group Sanctity in Late Medieval Europe* (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), 59; Caroline Walker Bynum, 'Why All the Fuss about the Body? A Medievalist's Perspective', *Critical Inquiry* 22.1 (1995): 1–33, and *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200–1336* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

¹⁷ On the Assisi chapel and the image of the Magdalene in that context, see Nurith Kenaan-Kedar, 'Emotion, Beauty and Franciscan Piety: A New Reading of the Magdalene Chapel in the Lower Church of Assisi', *Studi Medievali* 26 (1985): 699–710; Lorraine Schwartz, 'Patronage and Iconography in the Magdalen Chapel at Assisi', *Burlington Magazine* 133 (1991): 32–6; Giovanni Previtali, 'Le cappelle di S. Nicola et di S. Maria Maddalena nella chiesa inferiore di San Francesco', in *Giotto e i giotteschi in Assisi* (Rome: Canesi, 1969); and Gianfranco Malafarina, *La basilica di San Francesco ad Assisi* (Modena: Franco Cosimo Panini, 2005), esp. 74–81; on the Guidalotti-Rinuoccini chapel, see Michelle A. Erhardt, 'The Magdalene as Mirror', in *Mary Magdalene: Iconographic Studies from the Middle Ages to the Baroque*, ed. Michelle Erhardt and Amy Morris (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 23–6. Other essays in this volume discuss iconographic traditions that pertain to the Magdalene; for a sustained study of medieval images, see Viviana Vannucci, *Maria Maddalena: storia e iconografia nel Medioevo dal III al XIV secolo* (Rome: Gangemi, 2012).

¹⁸ See *Opuscoli di S. Francesco* quoted in Beryl D. De Selincourt, *Homes of the First Franciscans in Umbria, the Borders of Tuscany and the Northern Marches* (London: Dent, 1905), 175–6; Katherine L. Jansen, 'Mary Magdalen and the Mendicants: The Preaching of Penance in the Late Middle Ages', *Journal of Medieval History* 21 (1995): 1–25. On the Magdalene as she appears in medieval drama, see Theresa Coletti, *Mary Magdalene and the Drama of Saints: Theater, Gender, and Religion in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

¹⁹ Fra Jacopone di Todi, 'Il compianto della Vergine' from *La prima lauda del Libro 1*, cited and discussed in Antoine Frédéric Ozanam, *I poeti francescani in Italia nel secolo decimoterzo*, trans. Pietro Fanfani (Prato: Tipografia F. Alberghetti e C, 1854), 151–4.

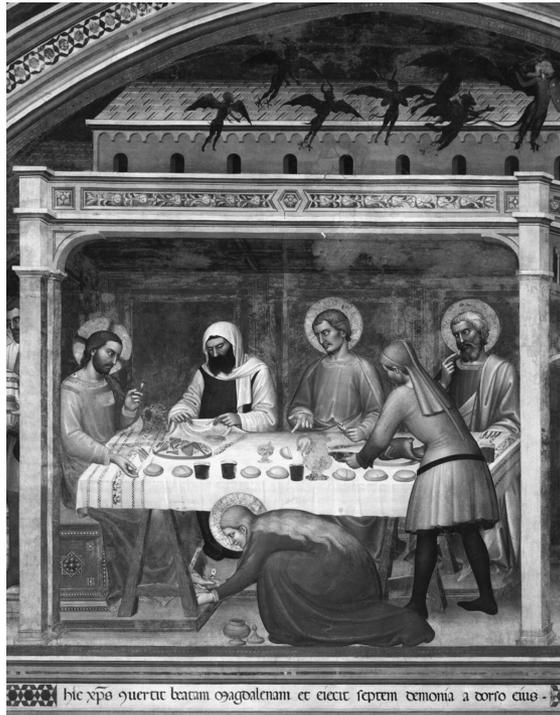


Fig. 2.3. Giovanni da Milano, Feast in the House of Simon the Pharisee (south wall, detail), Rinuccini Chapel, Santa Croce, Florence, 1365, fresco.

on the Life of Christ, which stages Christ's life in dramatic terms, turns the Magdalene into one of its main protagonists, describing the torrent of tears provoked by the penitent woman's shame and regret:

I have offended your Majesty in many and important ways. I have sinned against your every law and have multiplied my sins above the number of sands in the sea. But I, the wicked sinner, come for your mercy; I am grieved and afflicted; I beg for your pardon, prepared to make amends for my sins and never to depart from obedience to you.²⁰

In a fourteenth-century illustrated manuscript of the *Meditations*, the Magdalene lies prostrate at Christ's feet, rubbing them vigorously with her long hair; her demeanour is markedly different from that of the other five figures in the image. In order to imitate the saint, the manuscript seems to imply, one has to give in to the act completely, along with all the contradictory passions ignited in and experienced by the body and the soul.

²⁰ *Meditations on the Life of Christ: An Illustrated Manuscript of the Fourteenth Century* (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS ital. 115), ed. and trans. Isa Ragusa and Rosalie B. Green (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961), 171–2.

The emotional saint and her emotional followers thus provided excellent models for affective devotion.²¹ Yet, perhaps because the Magdalene is present rather than represented in the Metropolitan reliquary, the emotional community of her worshippers here is offered a rather different model of proper imitative behaviour, one that privileges restraint. Two Franciscan saints and two angels stand composed in their elegant towers, the serene attendants of Mary Magdalene's body within the walls of golden Jerusalem. The Crucifixion scene on the medallion similarly exalts self-possession. The crucified Christ turns away from the demonstrative Saint John and lowers his head towards the unruffled Virgin Mary, who kneels down in prayer. The blood that sprays liberally from Christ's side wound—and appears to be the focus of the Virgin's devotions—seems aimed at her alone. Saint Clare, watching from the margins of the disk, is focused on the Virgin; but the gaze of Saint Francis, watching the scene from the opposite side, misses Saint John and alights on Christ. Both Francis and Clare, whose own *vitae* are fraught with highly emotional moments, appear exceedingly tranquil on the medallion. The emotional paradigm is figured through the lines of sight: the Virgin and John experience the moment of the Crucifixion first-hand, witnessed by Francis and Clare, who are in turn witnessed by the beholders. The Virgin is Clare's model, and Christ is Francis's, and both Clare and Francis serve as intermediaries who direct devotional vectors between the biblical past and the viewers' present. The affective chain of associations allows beholders to re-experience the Crucifixion both through their own faculties of seeing and through the eyes of the saints who model the proper behaviour for the devout.

The role of sight was of particular importance in the construction of Mary's legend: it is the cornerstone of Christ's post-mortem appearance to the saint. When Mary spies him in the garden and recognizes him, she is allowed to see but ordered not to touch: the optical trumps the haptic.²² In untangling the implications of this prohibition, Saint Augustine concludes that Christ's admonition was not to be taken literally but rather as a directive for a proper mode of belief: 'do not touch earth and so lose heaven; do not cleave to the man and so lose belief in God'.²³ The

²¹ See Sarah McNamer, *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011) on affective devotion, and especially chapter 3 on its relationship with Franciscan order.

²² For the iconography of this theme, see essays in Barbara Baert et al., eds., '*Noli me tangere*': *Mary Magdalene: One Person, Many Images*, exhibition catalogue (Leuven: Maurits Sabbe Library, Faculty of Theology, 2006). On the role of sight and touch in the imagery of '*Noli me tangere*', see Lisa M. Rafanelli, 'Michelangelo's *Noli Me Tangere* for Vittoria Colonna, and the Changing Status of Women in Renaissance Italy', in *Mary Magdalene: Iconographic Studies*, ed. Erhardt and Morris, 223–48. On medieval concepts of sight and its haptic qualities, see especially David Lindberg, *Theories of Vision from Al-Kindi to Kepler* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976) and Suzannah Biernoff, *Sight and Embodiment in the Middle Ages* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); for a case study that explores the way that haptic qualities of sight can be considered in the study of late medieval art, see Elina Gertsman, 'Multiple Impressions: Christ in the Winepress and the Semiotics of the Printed Image', *Art History* 36.2 (2013): 310–37.

²³ Augustine, *Sermo CCXLIV In diebus Paschalibus XV*, *PL* 38, col. 1150: '*Noli tangendo terram, coelum perdere; noli remanendo in homine, in Deum non credere*'.

interplay of sight and touch is foregrounded in the medallion images in a way that appears prescriptive: John and Christ do not see each other but their cloaks overlap; the Virgin and Christ are set at a certain remove from one another but are connected by sight.

The emphasis on seeing as an instrument and vehicle of devotion is a typical one for the Franciscan milieu.²⁴ Among later medieval theorists of sight, Franciscans—including Roger Bacon, John Peckham, John Duns Scott, and William Ockham—are prominent.²⁵ Franciscans were fond of using transparent glass, which was produced with great success in Italy in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.²⁶ The reverse-glass painting technique of *verre églomisé* also signalled humility—it was like, and yet unlike, the expensive enamel it sought to imitate, and so appropriate for objects produced by the mendicant order. In addition, the glass allowed for the clear display of subsidiary relics within the medallion. The receptive transparency of the *verre églomisé* is, however, complicated by the crystal mounted directly below. Crystal was symbolic of spiritual purity; after all, Revelation 22:1 likened the ‘pure river of water of life . . . proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb’ to the purity of crystal. And yet the clarity of the crystal is deceptive and muddled: the hollowed-out chamber distorts and enlarges the relic, while the rest of the mineral’s surface is reflective and refractive. In its simultaneous revelatory and obfuscating quality, crystal serves as an apt metaphor for the uncertain and flawed ways that the memory of the saint is awakened in the beholder through the complex set of mnemonic associations.

EMOTIONS AND MATERIAL

Glass and crystal were not the only substances to inflect the affective experience of their beholder. The rest of the reliquary’s rich set of materials taps into a complex emotional web where nostalgia, fear, longing, desire, vulnerability, and pain intertwine. Gilded copper, for example, evoked a distinct sense of loss, as the material was strongly associated with the Golden Gate of Jerusalem. This was the gate at which the Virgin was conceived immaculately, through the kiss of her parents,

²⁴ Anne Derbes, *Picturing the Passion in Late Medieval Italy: Narrative Painting, Franciscan Ideologies, and the Levant* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), discusses Franciscan interest in images and so in seeing; see David L. Jeffrey, ‘Franciscan Spirituality and the Growth of Vernacular Culture’, in *By Things Seen: Reference and Recognition in Medieval Thought* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1979), 143–60; 150–1 on sensory experiences.

²⁵ On Bacon’s theories of vision, see David Lindberg, ed., *Roger Bacon and the Origins of Perspectiva in the Middle Ages: A Critical Edition and English Translation of Bacon’s Perspectiva* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996) and *Theories of Vision*, esp. 122–33; on Peckham, see David Lindberg, ‘Lines of Influence in Thirteenth-Century Optics: Bacon, Witelo, and Peckham’, *Speculum* 46.1 (1971): 66–83; on Scott and Ockham, Katherine Tachau, *Vision and Certitude in the Age of Ockham: Optics, Epistemology, and the Foundations of Semantics, 1250–1345* (Leiden: Brill, 1988), esp. 55.

²⁶ On the technique, see Dillian Gordon’s work, especially ‘The Mass Production of Franciscan Piety: Another Look at Some Umbrian *verres églomisés*’, *Apollo* 140.394 (1994): 33–42 and ‘A Siense *Verre Églomisé* and Its Setting’, *Burlington Magazine* 123.936 (1981): 132, 148–51, 153.

Anna and Joachim; this was the gate through which Christ triumphantly entered the city.²⁷ This was also the entrance used by the Emperor Heraclius upon his return from Persia with the wood of the True Cross: the legend mentioned by Hrabanus Maurus and repeated by Honorius Augustodunensis some three centuries later.²⁸ In 1106, the Russian orthodox abbot Daniel arrived in Jerusalem and described the gate as made with ‘wonderful cunning, plated with gilded copper: inside it has skilful paintings on copper and outside it is strongly plated with iron’.²⁹ In 1165, John of Würzburg characterized the gate’s survival through the centuries of military conflicts as a result of ‘Divine protection’, and described it as being locked throughout the year, opening only on Palm Sunday and on the feast of the exaltation of the Cross.³⁰ And yet, by the time the reliquary was made, Jerusalem had returned to Muslim control; the gates now led to a mosque, abutted a cemetery, and so were not to be approached by Christians. Jerusalem dissolved into a nostalgic dream of unattainable desire. The Magdalene arrived in Gaul from the Holy Land that was hostile to Christians in her day, and her reliquary indexed the material of the sacred gates from the Holy Land that was, once again, hostile to and inaccessible for the devout of the fifteenth century.

Silver was seen as a material of particular sacred purity; Psalm 12:6 compares the immaculateness of God’s words to ‘silver refined in a furnace’. As Herbert Kessler argues, ‘silver’s allegorical function derived . . . from its own unique characteristics’ because ‘unlike gold, which is found in nuggets or small grains, silver ore must be fired for its white color, shine, and purity’.³¹ Indeed, medieval thinkers, including Gregory the Great and the Venerable Bede, often discussed silver and gold in tandem with one another. For Bede, the silver and the gold of the temple apply, respectively, to ‘the clarity of eloquence’ and ‘the brilliance of wisdom’.³² Gregory the Great compared God’s divine nature to gold and human nature to silver, mixed so as to render God’s humanity ‘more glorious by His Godhead’ and moderate his divinity ‘by His Manhood’ much as in the mixture of silver and gold ‘silver indeed is rendered more brilliant, but the brightness of the gold is softened down’. He

²⁷ *Golden Legend*, 538.

²⁸ Hrabanus Maurus, *Homiliae LXX* in *PL*, CX, 133–4; Honorius Augustodunensis in *PL* CLXXII, 1004–6, discussed in Denys Pringle, *The Churches of the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem*, vol. III: *The City of Jerusalem: A Corpus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 103–8, no. 293, ‘The Golden Gate (Bab ar-Rahma, Bab at-Tauba)’, which also addresses the confusion between the Beautiful Gate of the Temple and the Golden Gate of Jerusalem. For additional discussion of and sources on the gates, see John Wilkinson, Joyce Hill, and William Francis Ryan, eds., *Jerusalem Pilgrimage, 1099–1185* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1988).

²⁹ *The Life and Journey of Daniel, Abbot of the Russian Land*, trans. F. W. Ryan, chapter XVIII, in *Jerusalem Pilgrimage*, ed. Wilkinson et al., 120–71; 133.

³⁰ Translated and cited in Pringle, *Churches of the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem*, 104; see Pringle, 106 for other sources that record the opening of gates. Muslim sources describe the gate in a similar way: in 1347, a Syrian scholar, al-Umari, identified its material as yellow copper; see A. S. Marmadji, ed. and trans., *Textes géographiques arabes sur la Palestine* (Paris: Gabalda, 1951), 237.

³¹ Herbert L. Kessler, ‘The Eloquence of Silver: More on the Allegorization of Matter’, in *L’Allegorie dans l’art du Moyen Âge: Formes et fonctions—Héritages, créations, mutations*, ed. Cristian Heck, *Les Études du RILMA*, 2 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), 49–65; 55.

³² Saint Bede the Venerable, *On the Temple*, ed. and trans. Seán Connolly, intro. Jennifer O’Reilly (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1995), 117.

continues: 'For since human nature shone forth with so many miracles by the virtue of the Godhead, the silver was improved by the gold; and because God could be recognized through the flesh, and because He endured therein so many adversities, the gold was, as it were, tempered by the silver.'³³ The gilded silver on the Magdalene's reliquary, then, was not merely a practical choice: the metal of temperance, although not mixed with, was ennobled by, gold, and it also restrained its brilliance, providing a potent physical and allegorical frame for the most important component of the reliquary, the saint's tooth.

A tooth is a semiotically fraught object: it stands as a particularly vivid synecdoche for the entirety of the human body because of the inevitable way it indexes pain. Toothache appears to have been a common affliction throughout the Middle Ages, often caused by dietary problems: teeth were worn out by coarse grains, and scurvy resulted in dental loss. Pain was often ineffectively treated by barbers or itinerant tooth-drawers who would either use no anaesthetic or would pour acid down the tooth to dull the pain (and destroy the nerve endings as collateral damage).³⁴ Infections were common, as were fractured jaws. It is no wonder that non-invasive remedies—which included magic spells, prayer, herbal remedies, and pilgrimage—were often prescribed for toothaches; their efficacy is more than questionable. A list of instruments that Guy de Chauliac advises proper dentists to have—which include a variety of probes, rasps, scrapers, toothed tenacula, and tooth trephines—suggests a rather terrifying process.³⁵ No less terrifying is the image accompanying the 'Dentes' entry in the encyclopaedia *Omne Bonum*, which features a fearsome extraction with large forceps and a tremendous necklace studded with teeth, presumably the dentist's trophies, enlarged for legibility and didactic purposes (Fig. 2.4).³⁶ If nothing else, it suggests that dentistry was perceived as somewhat akin to torture. And, indeed, the knocking out of teeth was practised as a form of persecution, as is amply witnessed by the case of one Capitano del Popolo in Perugia who tortured a man by burning his feet, cutting off his penis, and removing his teeth.³⁷ Such torture also played a role in hagiographic imagination: the martyrdom of Saint Apollonia, who lost her teeth at the beginning of her ordeal, was commonly visualized in violent and sometimes bloody images (Fig. 2.5).

The tooth relic, in other words, would evoke the vast landscape of familiar pain located in a visible and immediately knowable part of the body—and would therefore probably provoke a more visceral response than, for example, a metatarsal bone

³³ S. Gregorii Magni, *Moralia in Job*, ed. Marcus Adriaen, CCSL 143, pt. 2 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1985), book 28, 5, pp. 1397–8, trans. in Kessler, 'The Eloquence of Silver', 54.

³⁴ On medieval dentistry, see T. Anderson, 'Dental Treatment in Medieval England', *British Dental Journal* 197 (2004): 419–25.

³⁵ Guy de Chauliac, *Inventarium sive Chirurgia magna*, ed. Michael R. McVaugh, vol. I (Leiden: Brill, 1997), book 6, doctrine 2, chapter 2, part 5, p. 357.

³⁶ Lucy Freeman Sandler, *Omne bonum: A Fourteenth-Century Encyclopedia of Universal Knowledge*. *British Library MSS Royal 6 E VI–6 E VII*, vol. I (London: Harvey Miller, 1996), 95–6.

³⁷ 'Cronaca perugina inedita di Pietro Angelo di Giovanni', ed. O. Scalvanti, in *Bollettino della Deputazione di storia patria per l'Umbria* 4 (1898), 105.

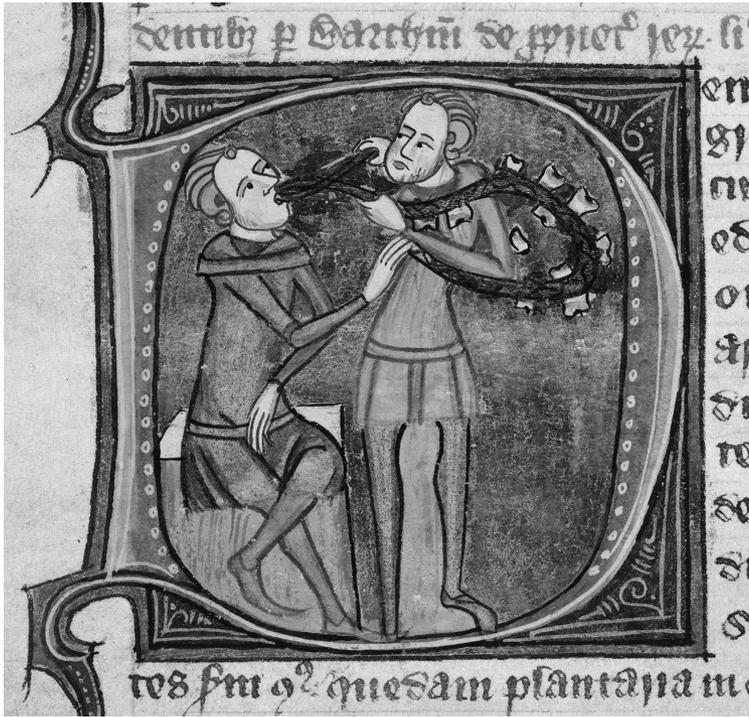


Fig. 2.4. 'Dentes' (Teeth) from *Omne Bonum*, London, 1360–75. British Library, Royal 6 E VI, fol. 503v.

(alleged to have been Saint Sebastian's) enclosed in a contemporaneous crystal and silver reliquary (Fig. 2.6). Aside from recalling St Hugh's ignominious gustatory theft, the tooth relic also draws attention to the Magdalene's mouth. In doing so, it both recalls the saint's role as a preacher, the *apostolorum apostola*, and a missionary in the then-pagan Gaul, and cues the viewer's memory to two key narratives from the saint's life: the time when she is refused food upon arrival in Marseilles and the regular sessions in the desert when angels came to her to provide heavenly food.³⁸ As a fragment of a body, the relic thus serves an invitation to reconstruct the whole. The contrast between the young and beautiful penitent, defined by her desirable body, and the decaying tooth inserted into crystal would have been implicitly didactic, a saintly version of the *memento mori* and a potent reminder of the true nature of human flesh. In the late Middle Ages, the Magdalene was almost invariably represented as a beautiful young woman, even during her thirty-year-long exploits in the desert when she wore nothing but her long hair as clothing, and where she consumed no food or water but only, to quote Jacobus, 'the good things

³⁸ See Jansen, 'Maria Magdalena'.



Fig. 2.5. Detail of a miniature of the martyrdom of St Apollonia, from the Dunoi Hours, France (Paris), c.1440–c.1450. British Library, Yates Thompson MS 3, fol. 284v.

of heaven'.³⁹ Even at the hour of her death, the inevitable deterioration of her body was not perceptible: her 'countenance was so radiant . . . that one would more easily look straight into the sun than gaze upon her face'.⁴⁰ But this charismatic body stands at odds with the gruesomely naked relic. Not sheathed into concealing metal but rather put on display, the tooth was a powerful reminder of where the true significance of the Magdalene's body lay: not in its transient beauty but in the potency of the spirit that animated it—and that ostensibly continued to animate its fragments after her corporeal death.⁴¹

³⁹ *Golden Legend*, 380.

⁴⁰ *Golden Legend*, 381. Her dead body, in turn, filled the church where she was buried with a sweet odour.

⁴¹ On transparent reliquaries and the role of changing theories of sight in their appearances, see Martina Bagnoli, 'The Stuff of Heaven: Material Complexity and Divine Craftsmanship in Medieval Reliquaries', in *Treasures of Heaven*, ed. Bagnoli et al., 137–47; Christof L. Diedrichs, *Vom Glauben zum Sehen: die Sichtbarkeit der Reliquie im Reliquiar: ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Sehens* (Berlin: Weissensee, 2001); Elina Gertsman, *Worlds Within: Opening the Medieval Shrine Madonna* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015), 37–41; on reliquaries and charismatic bodies, see Cynthia Hahn, *Strange Beauty: Issues in the Making and Meaning of Reliquaries, 400–circa 1204* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012), and Cynthia Hahn, 'The Spectacle



Fig. 2.6. Monstrance with a relic of Saint Sebastian, 1484, Germany, Lower Saxony, Brunswick. Gilded silver, rock crystal. H: 18½ in.

Animation also inheres in the reliquary, albeit in ways that can only be metaphorized.⁴² ‘Things in themselves lack nothing,’ writes Bruno Latour; they do not need human presence to be activated.⁴³ And yet, and yet: inasmuch as objects have their own contingency, they exert their pressure on the beholder, and their agency can be read through the beholding experiences oriented towards them. This agency is unremitting, perceptible in part through the affective and mnemonic network that binds together narratives and pious exercises, things and people. Perhaps ‘never exhausted by [its] semiotics’, to borrow Bennett’s words, the Magdalene reliquary acts upon its viewers by making its subject (the saint), its function (a devotional tool), and its materials (glass, metal, mineral) into emotional conduits

of the Charismatic Body: Patrons, Artists, and Body-Part Reliquaries’, in *Treasures of Heaven*, ed. Bagnoli et al., 163–72.

⁴² Bogost discusses such metaphorization in *Alien Phenomenology*, using as one example a relationship between a car engine and distilled hydrocarbons; Bogost asks whether and how objects can perceive: whether the way that the engine explodes hydrocarbons does ‘violence to them’ or, rather, ‘express[es] ardor, the loving heat of friendship or passion’, 75.

⁴³ Bruno Latour, ‘Interlude IV’, in *Irreductions*, part 2 of *The Pasteurization of France*, trans. Alan Sheridan and John Law (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 193.

for its audiences.⁴⁴ What the audiences themselves perceived in this assemblage is uncertain—reception is ephemeral; its traces in artefacts are unreliable; meanings slip. But we can grasp at them by closely attending to stories, images, and things—silver, copper, crystal, teeth—by which the emotional communities of viewers were prodded, disturbed, and, to return to the formulation of Deisseroth’s patient, so certainly bothered.

⁴⁴ Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 5.