Sacralized Wounds. Mutilation and Resistance in Christian Female Martyrs´ Spanish Hagiographies: St. Agatha, St. Lucy, and St. Apollonia

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1. Introduction

Martyrdom[1] holds a foundational place in Christian tradition, which serves as both a theological cornerstone and a model of ultimate discipleship. From a theological perspective, for a martyr "to sacrifice his or her life for the faith is to practice the *imitatio Christi* in a very special sense" (Wood, 15), as Jesus himself is considered the prototypical martyr who died for love of mankind. This way, early Christian martyrdom was understood as a participation in Christ's salvific death, and, according to its etymology, martyrs (μάρτυς) were seen as witnesses who testified to their faith through the ultimate sacrifice[2]. In addition to the existing of scriptural foundation for martyrdom, in texts like John 15:13 ("Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends"), this phenomenon served crucial social and communal functions in early Christianity. Middleton's *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Christian Martyrdom* emphasizes how martyrdom functioned to reinforce group identity in opposition to Roman imperial culture and Jewish traditions, as martyrs' *Acts* both inspired and instructed Christian communities who faced persecution. On the literary side, the *Acta martyrum* are the earliest manifestations of Christian literature and they established important literary conventions, due to their historical, theological and rhetorical nature. Moreover, they are the foundation for the institutionalization of martyrdom, which consisted in the creation of the liturgical calendar, the veneration of relics and the establishment of pilgrimage centers.

Female martyrs, in particular, have been the focus of research attention in recent decades. This scholarly field has experienced an evolution from peripheral concern to a central area of inquiry that intersects medievalism, gender theory, religious studies and literary criticism. The modern academic study of female martyrdom began in the 1990s with pioneering works that challenged traditional hagiographic scholarship. Caroline Walker Bynum's *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* established crucial frameworks to understand how women in the high Middle Ages used their bodies as sites of religious expression and resistance. Simultaneously, Judith Perkins' *The Suffering Self: Pain and Narrative Representation in the Early Christian Era* examined how early Christian women's martyrdom narratives functioned as forms of self-representation and resistance to patriarchal structures.

In fact, the contribution of feminist theory to the study of martyr hagiography has been very significant. For example, Elizabeth Castelli's *Martyrdom and Memory: Early Christian Culture Making* demonstrated how martyrdom narratives, particularly those that involved women, functioned as "culture-making" texts that shaped Christian identity and collective memory. The literary dimensions of female hagiography have also received increased attention. Alison Goddard Elliott's *Roads to Paradise: Reading the Lives of the Early Saints* provided important methodological frameworks for the analysis of hagiographic texts as literature rather than mere historical documents, and more recently, Virginia Burrus' *The Sex Lives of Saints: An Erotics of Ancient Hagiography* offered a provocative analysis of the erotic dimensions of

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[2] However, as Hall (2) points out, living martyrs were quite possible, as they have to give their testimony in order to become a martyr. Dying means to confirm their testimony and ratify it, becoming a present proof of Christ's Resurrection and the truth of faith.

ascetic and martyrdom narratives. Finally, body studies have influenced the field of medieval studies too with works such as Sarah Salih's *Versions of Virginity in Late Medieval England,* which examines how female martyrs' bodies functioned as sites of contested meaning, particularly regarding sexuality and spiritual authority. As we have seen, female martyrial hagiography is a very fruitful field today, in which debates such as historical authenticity versus literary construction or female agency in martyrial narratives are raised. The latter will be central to our research, as it will help to explain the meaning of mutilations in the selected saints.

As we have already said, the earliest manifestations of the hagiographic genre, according to Baños in *Las vidas de santos en la literatura medieval española* (18), comprise those narratives that "arise from the cult paid to the Christian martyrs, whose passion evokes, evidently, that of Christ himself"—namely, the *Acts* of the Martyrs. These primitive texts constituted brief, factual records that documented the legal proceedings, testimonies and circumstances surrounding the martyrs' deaths, serving primarily as historical testimony of their sacrifice. However, the transformation of these sparse documentary sources into the rich hagiographic tradition we encounter in medieval and Renaissance literature involved a complex process of literary elaboration that spanned nearly a millennium. First, the original *acta* were incorporated into martyrologies: liturgical calendars that provided brief commemorative entries for each saint's feast day, containing essential biographical information and the circumstances of their martyrdom. These martyrologies, exemplified by works such as the *Martyrologium Hieronymianum* (5th-6th centuries), remained primarily functional texts designed to organize the liturgical year. The genre evolved into *Passionaria,* collections that gathered together the individual accounts of martyrs' sufferings and offered more detailed narratives than the martyrological entries, while maintaining their focus on historical documentation. Parallel to this development emerged the *Legendaria,* which expanded beyond martyrs to include the lives of confessors, virgin saints, and other holy figures, which incorporated increasingly elaborate miraculous episodes. The eighth and ninth centuries witnessed the flourishing of individual *Vitae sanctorum*: comprehensive saint biographies that combined historical elements with theological interpretation. These texts marked a significant shift toward literary sophistication and pastoral utility, as they were designed not merely to record facts but to provide moral instruction and spiritual edification. The culminating transformation occurred with the compilation of Jacobus de Voragine's *Legenda aurea* in the thirteenth century, which synthesized centuries of hagiographic tradition into an encyclopedic collection that fundamentally altered both the nature and function of martyr narratives. Unlike the original *acta,* which were essentially legal documents, the *Legenda aurea* represented a pastoral tool specifically designed as working material for preachers and monastic communities.

From this foundational tradition emerge the four collections that constitute the corpus of this study. These collections—the *Leyenda de los santos*, the *Flos sanctorum renacentista*, Alonso de Villegas' *Flos sanctorum*, and Pedro de Ribadeneyra's *Flos sanctorum* —have been selected following chronological, typological and methodological criteria. The corpus encompasses the final years of the fifteenth century to the late sixteenth century, embracing both the pre-Tridentine hagiographic tradition and the earliest manifestations of post-Tridentine renewal. The *Leyenda de los santos* represents the late medieval tradition and the final expressions of inherited hagiographic models, whilst the works of Villegas and Ribadeneyra already reflect the influence of the Tridentine spirit on the cult of saints and their textual representation. From a typological perspective, the selected texts constitute paradigmatic examples of the principal Iberian hagiographic models of their respective periods. From vernacular adaptations of the Jacobean *Legenda Aurea t*o post-Tridentine *Flos sanctorum,* each work represents a specific evolutionary phase in the transmission and re-

elaboration of hagiographic traditions, thereby facilitating the documentation of textual transformations. The editorial authority and dissemination of these texts guarantee their historical representativeness. All enjoyed extensive circulation and recognition within their respective periods, ensuring that the observed transformations do not constitute isolated cases but rather general tendencies. The geographical and linguistic coherence of the selected corpus constitutes another fundamental methodological factor. The Iberian provenance of all texts ensures cultural homogeneity and permits analysis of transformations within a specific tradition, avoiding variables derived from different national or linguistic contexts that might complicate the interpretation of results. The trajectory of these four hagiographic collections—the first two derived from the *Legenda Aurea* through Compilation A and Compilation B, and the latter two inspired by the works of Lippomano and Surio—has been extensively addressed by Aragüés Aldaz (2016, 2014, 2012, 2005, 2000).

The hypothesis of this study is that the corporeal wounds inflicted upon female Christian martyrs in Spanish hagiographic literature function as multivalent symbolic elements rather than mere narrative spectacle[3]. Specifically, the mutilations suffered by saints Agatha, Lucy, and Apollonia operate as instruments of spiritual communication, identity affirmation, and symbolic transgression of patriarchal order. The body injuries sustained by female martyrs constitute a form of symbolic transfiguration wherein physical mutilation becomes spiritual elevation: rather than destroying the body, wounds re-signify it. The wounds also represent radical forms of bodily autonomy and symbolic masculinization of moral strength, which become sites of sacred authority that challenge established hierarchies of gender, power, and theological discourse. Moreover, we believe that the representation of martyrial wounds undergoes significant transformation between pre-Tridentine and post-Tridentine hagiographic texts, which will be tested through comparative textual analysis of four key Spanish hagiographic collections aforementioned.

2. Theoretical framework

The study of female Christian martyrs in Spanish hagiographic literature reveals a complex cultural phenomenon where traditional gender hierarchies are simultaneously challenged and reinforced through the paradoxical discourse of martyrdom. The cases of Saints Agatha, Lucy, and Apollonia exemplify how medieval religious narratives constructed female

[3] This hypothesis has been applied to the significance of scars in the Middle Ages by Dickason (19-21): "Medieval scars performed acts of signification that transgressed the skin's barrier. In medieval Europe, it was religious meaning that predominated in the semiotic function of scars". She also discusses the meaning of scars specifically in women: "Women's scars could signify their sanctity or provide proof of their mystical legitimacy". Pinkus (25), citing Bynum (2007, 1–22), also argues that "in late medieval European Christian thought, wounds and mutilated organs were seen as ways to access the body of Christ", which relates to our hypothesis in the sense that the wounds had a high symbolic potential. Later, Pinkus (74) emphasizes this communicative dimension of wounds on the skin with the following comparison: "skin was perceived as cloth or vellum on which human identity was written: blood was the ink, and raw flesh, hair follicles, veins, and wounds were the letters, which silently attested to human suffering." This author also refers to other symbolic values of wounds in the meditative practices of the time, which related them to love and happiness, since the wound initiated an intellectual process of exegesis and devotion that allowed Christians to participate in the wounds of Christ (68, 118). For her part, Streete reconciles the two dimensions of the body, as spectacle and as symbol, in the first chapter of her work, where she cites Scarry (14) and states that "the body serves as a visible symbol of the power of God as it was imagined to exist over earthly opposing powers, political, social, and personal, working through the limits of fragile mortal flesh, so that it becomes transparent, as a wholly convincing spectacle of power." She also calls the martyr's body a "textual device", and she explains: "thus the body of the martyr is doubly witness: once as literally visible and often speaking, hence as continually ally "seen" or "speaking" through the text, the written witness."

sanctity through mechanisms that transformed apparent powerlessness into spiritual authority, yet did so within frameworks that ultimately served patriarchal religious structures.

At the heart of this transformation lies what Perkins identifies as a fundamental reversal in the meaning of suffering and death. Rather than reading "the martyrs' broken bodies as defeat", Christian discourse insists on "interpreting them as symbols of victory over society's power" (121). In fact, Gómez Moreno (33) equates the courage of fictional heroes with that of martyrs, as both are willing to shed their blood for their respective causes. This reversal gains particular significance when applied to women, who occupied positions of social and legal subordination in both ancient and medieval societies. For women, traditionally excluded from public testimony and legal witness, martyrdom provided an unprecedented opportunity to speak with divine authority.

This testimonial function operates through what Magli describes as the equalizing power of shed blood. Unlike "the Jewish blood of generation or affiliation" the martyr's blood "is shed: their own blood, which has value in itself inasmuch as it is individual and unique, just as death is individual and unique" (41). Through this shedding of blood, "all the differences of gender, age, or social status, which have always attributed a value to the word in any society and in all eras, are annulled in martyrdom because the potency of death substitutes sexual potency" (41). This substitution proves crucial to understanding how female martyrs transcended their prescribed social roles, and how they were transformed from beings defined primarily by their reproductive functions into witnesses whose testimony carried divine weight.

The mechanism through which this transformation occurred was understood by early Christian writers as a process of spiritual masculinization. From Christianity's earliest days, "becoming male" served as "a metaphor applied to women who were uncommonly devoted to their Christian beliefs, particularly if they renounced their sexuality" (Riches & Salih, 52). Saint Jerome, in *Commentarius in Epistolam ad Ephesios* III.5 (Cotter-Lynch, 25), articulated this principle with striking clarity: "as long as woman is for birth and children, she is different from men as body is from the soul. But when she wishes to serve Christ more than the world, then she will cease to be a woman and will be called a man." This concept reveals the profound ambivalence at the heart of female martyrdom narratives: women could achieve spiritual authority, but only by symbolically abandoning their feminine identity.

As Gómez Moreno (151) rightly points out, the calendar of saints is full of discreet and beautiful young women who rejected a convenient marriage or other sexual propositions in order to preserve the jewels of chastity and virginity: Saint Tecla, Saint Barbara, Saint Ursula, Saint Brigid, Saint Macrina the Younger, Saint Euphrosyne, Saint Justina... The list is endless. This emphasis on virginity in female martyr narratives directly serves the aforementioned masculinization process. As Magli observes, "the great majority of women martyrs are remembered by the Church as 'virgins'", reflecting how "virginity became the supreme virtue of women" in Christian discourse (49). However, this virginity functioned as more than sexual purity; it represented a fundamental rejection of the social expectations that defined women through their relationships to men and their reproductive capacity. The virgin martyr thus occupied a liminal space where she could claim masculine spiritual authority while remaining biologically female, achieving what Castelli describes as access to "holiness and salvation by 'becoming male'" (30).

This gender transcendence manifested most dramatically through the martyred body, which served simultaneously as the site of torture and the locus of sanctification. The Christian doctrine of incarnation fundamentally altered traditional body-soul relationships, establishing that "the flesh (*caro*) cannot be unimportant" since "humans are a compound of rational soul and body, and the body is not just a temporary residence to be discarded" (Clark, 111). This theological position elevated the physical suffering of martyrs from mere incidental pain to

spiritually significant revelation, making their tortured bodies sites of divine presence rather than simply objects of persecution.

Yet the representation of female martyrs' torture reveals distinctly gendered patterns of violence that complicate this spiritual elevation. The tortures inflicted upon virgin martyrs were "often conceived in such a way that their punishments become forms of sexual molestation. They are stripped and displayed, their breasts are grabbed and mutilated, their bellies are penetrated with phallic swords" (Riches & Salih, 57). These sexualized torments paradoxically facilitated the very gender transcendence they appeared to violate. The "motif of the forced mastectomy, for example, associated most closely with Agatha" among other virgin martyrs, "removes the most visible physical sign of femininity, and implies a process of masculinization that ultimately connotes a state of spiritual grace, attainable by women only if they suppress physical and social indicators that are understood to be manifestations of the female" (52).

This paradoxical relationship between gendered violence and spiritual empowerment reflects the broader cultural work performed by hagiographic narratives. These texts function not as simple historical records but as "key documents in early Christian self-fashioning" that actively "work to create and project a new 'mental set toward the world'" (Perkins, 110) which differs from Roman and Jewish mindsets. They participate in what Perkins identifies as "a struggle between two competing systems for investing meaning in human action", constructing new frameworks for understanding power, authority, and social value. The narratives of female martyrs thus engage in complex cultural negotiations about women's roles, religious authority, and the relationship between suffering and sanctity.

The revolutionary potential of this cultural work becomes evident in what Magli identifies as Christianity's true "scandal": "the revolution in the woman's role; the shifting of women to the foreground; the force of their self-presentation as subjects, as guides, as leaders in action; the potency of their word; the proud, indomitable certainty of their blood's value" (50). Female martyrs demonstrated that women could exhibit the heroism previously reserved for men, and more significantly, that society could "call upon them to demonstrate it, acknowledging their right to do so" (45). This acknowledgment represented a fundamental shift in cultural assumptions about gender and capability.

However, this revolutionary potential operated within constraints that ultimately reinforced patriarchal religious structures. As Magli critically observes, the tragic irony of female martyrdom lies in how women, "by unwavering deeds of courage down through the two thousand years of Christian Europe", assured "victory for the religion of sacrifice, victory for the primacy of victims" by "offering themselves up as victims but at the same time by serving the needs of a power demanding more and more victims in order to reinforce itself as power" (2003, 50). The empowerment achieved through martyrdom thus remained bounded by its dependence on victimization and sacrifice.

This complex relationship between empowerment and constraint becomes further complicated when examining how late medieval culture developed increasingly sophisticated relationships with violence and suffering. Medieval martyrological discourse created what Clark describes as the ability to "find beauty and significance even in the torture and destruction of the body" (106), transforming brutal reality into spiritual metaphor. This aestheticization operated within a cultural context where "the late medieval perception of pain differs dramatically from our own", characterized by what Cohen terms "philopassianism – the deliberate attempt to feel as much pain as possible" (Riches & Salih, 51). Pain became not something to be avoided but actively sought as "a means to salvation, purgation and truth" (51).

The analysis of Spanish hagiographies of Saints Agatha, Lucy, and Apollonia must account for how these broader theoretical frameworks operated within specific cultural and temporal contexts. Just as "the fourth-century church in Italy was constructing a history and a tradition from the deaths of martyrs" (Clark, 110), Spanish adaptations of these stories served

particular cultural and political functions within their historical moment. The hagiographic tradition consistently "inverted the values of its contemporary society", introducing "new categories of subjects—the poor, the sick, the suffering—and functioned to reform the cultural notion of the human community" (Perkins, 213).

Moreover, the medium of representation significantly shapes the meanings created around female martyrdom. As Riches and Salih observe, "something happens in the translation of text into image" where textual accounts that "mention the abilities of the women to engage in intellectual debate" and conclude with dignified executions are transformed into visual narratives that "often undo the idea of privilege and create meanings and viewer responses fraught with ambivalence" (57). This observation suggests that Spanish hagiographic texts must be analyzed with attention to how their specific narrative strategies construct meaning differently from other forms of representation.

Understanding female Christian martyrs in Spanish hagiographies thus requires recognizing their occupation of a fundamentally liminal space where traditional gender categories are simultaneously reinforced and transcended. Through martyrdom, these figures achieve forms of spiritual masculinity while their narratives continue to emphasize specifically feminine forms of vulnerability and violation. They embody what Castelli describes as the paradox wherein early Christian women gain "access to holiness" but "can do so only through the manipulation of conventional gender categories" (33). The analysis of Saints Agatha, Lucy, and Apollonia as female mutilated martyrs within this framework reveals how Spanish hagiographic tradition navigated the complex intersection of empowerment and subjugation, creating texts that both challenged and reproduced contemporary gender hierarchies while serving as sites of cultural negotiation where competing discourses of female agency, religious authority, and social order were articulated through the dramatic spectacle of sanctified suffering.

3. Corpus analysis

3.1. Saint Agatha of Catania

Saint Agatha of Catania, venerated as the patron saint of women and nurses, protector of Cathania and commemorated liturgically on February 5th, was according to tradition a young woman who publicly professed her Christian faith before the Roman judge Quinctianus. As punishment for her defiance, he ordered her breasts to be severed: this is why she is usually depicted with her breasts on a tray, just like Saint Eulalia of Mérida, as mentioned by Gómez Moreno (256), since it was common for some saints to share attributes. During her subsequent imprisonment, Saint Peter is said to have appeared to her in a divine vision, providing miraculous healing. Quinctianus later commanded that she be placed upon a bed of burning coals; however, this torture was interrupted by a providential earthquake[4]. Upon her return to prison, the saint beseeched God to receive her soul and expired peacefully, expressing gratitude for divine assistance in enduring her martyrdom. The narrative concludes with divine retribution befalling Quinctianus: while journeying on horseback to confiscate Agatha's possessions, he was thrown from his mount and subsequently perished by drowning in a river, his horse having fatally injured him.

The preceding account outlines the fundamental structure of saint Agatha's story. Across all four versions, she eagerly embraces martyrdom ("Lloraua cada dia rogando al señor que cumpliesse su desseo e la hiziesse venir a la gloria del martyrio": *Flos sanctorum renacentista*, 146), confident that the Holy Spirit or Christ will intervene to heal or save her in

[4] As Gómez Moreno (93) explains, it is common for the death of a saint to be heralded by miracles, as in this case. The author also mentions the death of Saint Emerenciana at the tomb of Saint Agnes, which was also preceded by an earthquake.

the face of the judge's violence: "Si me llagas e me atormentas el spiritu santo sanar me ha" (*Leyenda de los santos*, 61). This is due to the fact that martyrdom is conceived not merely as suffering, but rather the supreme path to union with Christ. For virgin martyrs such as Agatha, the desire to die for Christ is portrayed as an expression of absolute love, unwavering fidelity, and a deliberate renunciation of the earthly realm. The saint's confidence is not necessarily understood as an anticipation of physical rescue—despite the presence of miraculous healing—but as an affirmation of assured spiritual salvation and ultimate victory over death.

In addition, all four accounts consistently mention six wounds, four of which are inflicted upon Agatha. The first wound inflicted upon her by Quinctianus is of a spiritual nature: he places her in the custody of the prostitute Aphrodisia with the intent of corrupting her soul[5]. This attempt, however, proves unsuccessful, as the saint responds to him:

> Mi coraçon esta assentado sobre piedra muy firme e esta fundado sobre jesu christo hijo de dios biuo e vuestras palabras son assi como viento y vuestros prometimientos como lluuias quefallecen de ligero e vuestros espantos como rios que passan arrebatados e no podran derribar los cimientos de mi casa. (*Flos sanctorum renacentista*, 146)

The second wound the saint endures is a slap to the face—an act intended to humiliate and assert authority—followed by a series of tortures which Agatha, in a display of spiritual strength, likens to good news, a precious treasure, and, ultimately, to the sifting of wheat:

> Mandola dar el juez maluado una bofetada enel rostro, diziendole, que aprendiesse a callar, y no injuriar a su señor. Quedó el rostro de la Santa denegrido y acardenalado, pero mas hermoso y resplandeciente delante de Dios. (Ribadeneyra, 200)

> No puede el grano de trigo quedar limpio y ser puesto en la troj, si primero no le apalean, y pisan, para que dexe la paja y arista. Assi mi alma no puede entrar en el cielo con la palma de martyrio, si primero mi cuerpo no es atormentado de verdugos. (Villegas, 102)

These metaphors are not unique to Agatha's narrative but draw extensively on biblical and patristic traditions. For instance, Saint Ignatius of Antioch, in his *Epistle to the Romans*, affirms that "it is better for me to die in Jesus Christ than to rule the ends of the earth" (q. in Foster, 103). With regard to the image of wheat, it is recurrent in both the Bible and patristic literature as a symbol for the process of purification inherent in martyrdom. In the Gospel of John 12:24, Jesus states: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." Saint Ignatius of Antioch employs this metaphor in reference to himself as "the wheat of God" (q. in Foster, 102), signifying that his suffering serves to purify him and prepare him for union with Christ.

The third wound inflicted upon Agatha is the removal of her breasts, to which she responds to judge Quinctianus:

> O ombre falso e cruel malo sin piedad no ouiste verguenca de cortar el miembro con que te crio tu madre pero yo tengo otras tetas enteras enla mi anima donde se crian todos mis deseos e las offresci de pequeña a Dios. (*Leyenda de los santos*, 61)

[5] This episode is mentioned by Gómez Moreno (143) as a paradigm of Saint Agatha's discretion, who resists all seduction by the prostitute Aphrodisia. In contrast, the character of Melibea in *La Celestina* is presented by this author as a contrast to the saint, as she falls directly for the offers and proposals of the procuress. As we will see in the conclusions, this is further proof of the more fortunate characterization of the saints, compared to the rest of the narrative heroines.

Notably, Agatha's reproach to Quinctianus regarding the removal of her breasts omits the final phrase in post-Tridentine santoral texts, likely due to the sensual and explicit nature of the metaphor, which was consequently excised to prevent inappropriate interpretations. According to the entry 'breast' in Chevalier's *Penguin Dictionary of Symbols*, breasts are connected with femininity, motherhood, security, fertility, intimacy and regeneration. The mutilation of her breasts symbolizes, in a radical manner, the saint's renunciation of her corporeal identity as an object of desire or procreation. Deprived of the possibility of physical motherhood, she is instead elevated to the status of *mater spiritualis*—a virgin wholly consecrated to Christ. Rather than signifying defeat, the mutilation becomes a spiritual triumph. Agatha reclaims agency over her suffering by interpreting it as a means of uniting herself with Christ. In this way, her body becomes a locus of resistance, where spiritual sovereignty overcomes physical oppression.

The fourth wound in the narrative is directed at Quinctianus' pride. This symbolic reversal is emphasized by the apostle Peter, who appears to Agatha in prison to heal her and explicitly refers to the humiliation of the persecutor as a wound to his arrogance: "Este consul loco quinciano te ha mucho atormentado mas tu mas lo atormentaste con tus respuestas sabias" (*Flos sanctorum renacentista*, 146-147). The fifth wound is suffered by Agatha when she is subjected to the torment of being laid upon a bed of burning coals, a final physical trial that underscores her perseverance in faith and the intensity of her martyrdom. The final wound, however, is once again borne by her persecutor: Quinctianus' sudden death, trampled by his own horse, serves as a divine act of retribution and narrative closure. This succession of wounds, alternating between the saint and her oppressor, illustrates a profound inversion of power.

Agatha's hagiographies are rewritten in two key aspects. First, while the saint's physical beauty and endurance amid suffering remain prominent, increasing emphasis is placed on her spiritual virtues. For example, in *Leyenda de los santos* (60) she is described as "fermosa en el cuerpo", but in *Flos sanctorum renacentista* (146) she is referred to as "muy fermosa enel cuerpo mas mucho mas noble e fermosa en el anima". Concurrently, in the post-Renaissance versions of the *Flos sanctorum*, following the apparition of Saint Peter, Agatha is granted the opportunity to escape from prison. However, she chooses to remain, demonstrating her patience and steadfastness, as she refuses to forfeit the crown of martyrdom. This development reflects the evolving demands of early modern spirituality, which—though still valuing martyrdom—sought a more nuanced and exemplary model of sanctity, one that integrated both external heroism and interior virtue.

The second aspect concerns the progressive intensification of the tortures depicted in the texts over time. To illustrate this, the *Flos sanctorum renacentista* recounts that, prior to the removal of her breasts, Agatha was subjected to a form of torture referred to as a "tormento que era llamado cauallejo", a device which later texts call "equleo". This tendency becomes even more pronounced in the post-Tridentine accounts, where the descriptions of Agatha's torments are particularly graphic, often dwelling in detail on the physical suffering endured by the saint:

> Estando leuantada del suelo, colgada de los braços, estirandola de los pies con duros cordeles, hiriendo su cuerpo con varas de hierro, desgarrando le con garfios y vñas azeradas, cubriendose todo de sangre. (Villegas, 102)

> Se le abrio todo su cuerpo con grandes heridas, por donde el furor del fuego entraua hasta las entrañas, no bastando a apagar le la sangre que della corria en abundancia. (102-103)

This development reflects the Council of Trent's emphasis on the didactic function of hagiography, its exemplary nature and its role in promoting moral discipline and doctrinal conformity.

Finally, a notable distinction between the pre-Tridentine and post-Tridentine texts lies in the stylistic and rhetorical features of the latter. In Alonso de Villegas' *Flos sanctorum*—a work significantly authored by a former playwright—the narrative opens with a striking analogy between the wounds of Christ and his saints and precious stones:

> Aunque todo el cuerpo de Iesu Christo resplandece en el cielo, mas que el Sol sus llagas mucho mas resplandecen. Son Iacintos y Rubies engastados en finissimo oro. Lo mismo de los demas Sanctos. Los lugares en que padecieron heridas estaran en el cielo mas resplandecientes y hermosos, que las otras partes de su cuerpo. El a quien degollaron, tendra vn collar en su garganta vistosissimo. El a quien apedrearon, las piedras se le tornaran piedras preciosissimas. Y assi santa Agatha, por que le cortaron los pechos, seran los suyos de los mas hermosos del cielo. (102)

This metaphor is not novel: in patristic and scholastic theology the blood of Christ was regarded as a spiritual treasure, the *pretium redemptionis.* Saint John Chrysostom is an early example of a preacher who utilized this rhetorical device, as evidenced by González Blanco: "Cuando vamos a los sepulcros de los mártires contemplamos sus heridas y sus estigmas, su sangre que fluye más preciosa que el oro".

On the other hand, Ribadeneyra's text, who was a historian, begins with the edict issued by the judge Quinctianus, ordering the imprisonment and torture of the Christians. Nonetheless, Ribadeneyra's portrayal of Agatha exhibits a distinct strength, demonstrated through her extended and highly poetic response to Quinctianus' threats, which imbues the narrative with a sense of heroism:

> No pienses espantarme con tus fieros, porque quiero que sepas que no ay cierua tan acossada y sedienta, que assi desee vna fuente de agua clara y limpia, como yo deseo ser de ti atormentada, para vnirme y abraçarme mas facilmente con Christo. [...] Si quieres vsar del hierro contra mi, he aqui el cuello: si quieres vsar los açotes, aqui estan las espaldas: si quieres abrasarme con el fuego, aquí está mi cuerpo: si me quieres echar a las fieras, mis carnes, mis pies, y mis manos, mi cabeça, y todos mis miembros estan aparejados para que los atormentes como quisieres. Atormenta, quema ata, aprieta, desuella, quebranta, hiere, arranca, ahoga, descoyunta y mata este mi cuerpo, que quanto mas cruel fueres conmigo, mas bien me haras, y yo seré mas fauorecida de mi dulce esposo Iesu Christo. Que hazes? Que esperas? Porque tardas tanto? (200)

By including this monologue, Ribadeneyra not only emphasizes the nobility of Agatha's resistance but also inspires admiration and devotion in his readers.

3.2. Saint Lucy of Syracuse

Saint Lucy of Syracuse, who was accused of being a Christian and martyred in 304 during the Diocletian persecution, is considered the patroness of blindness and eye diseases[6], and her feast day is celebrated on December 13th. The legend associating saint Lucy with the

[6]As Gómez Moreno (208) explains, the name Lucía refers to light, related to the sense of sight, but in German-speaking countries, Saint Augustine is the patron saint of sight, due to the similarity of the word 'Augen' ('eyes') to his name.

eyes does not appear in the pre-Tridentine hagiographies I have consulted, not even in the *Legenda aurea*. However, as we will see later, there were examples of this legend in the pictorial tradition.

Saint Lucy was a young Christian woman who had been betrothed to marriage, despite having no intention of marrying. As her mother was suffering from hemorrhages, they both undertook a pilgrimage to the tomb of Saint Agatha of Catania to pray for her healing. After hearing the Gospel, both fell asleep. At this moment, Lucy received a celestial vision of Agatha, adorned with precious stones and surrounded by a choir of angels, who told her that her intercession was not necessary for her mother's healing, as it was by Lucy's own faith that she had been cured. Subsequently, the saint instructed her mother to donate all her possessions to the poor as an example of Christian charity, and told her fiancé that she was investing her inheritance in a greater treasure, although he believed it to be material. Upon discovering that the treasure was spiritual, he denounced Lucy as a Christian before Judge Paschasius, who sought to destroy her both physically and morally, but without success.

Both the *Leyenda de los santos* and the *Flos sanctorum renacentista* begin the narrative with the pilgrimage to saint Agatha's grave: this episode shows the connection between Agatha and Lucy, as the first functions as a model to the latter, and it highlights the importance of the martyr tradition for later martyrs. Subsequently, in both hagiographies, the account proceeds to the martyrdom, during which Lucy receives two wounds. The first involves the pouring of a mixture of pitch, resin, and boiling oil, a trial she endures stoically. This wound could represent purification and spiritual endurance of physical suffering: this way, the burning elements would symbolize the trials that the soul must endure to maintain constant faith. The second occurs after an attempt to take her to a brothel for the purpose of rape; during this episode, Lucy miraculously becomes so heavy that not even ox carts can move her. This is followed by the piercing of her throat with a sword[7]. By another miracle, Saint Lucy retains her power of speech and dies only after receiving Communion. The symbolic significance of the second wound is particularly related to the voice and testimony. The throat is the organ of speech, and to pierce it is to attempt to silence it—that is, to prevent Lucy from proclaiming her faith. Her miraculous preservation of speech until after receiving Communion underscores the idea that neither death nor violence can extinguish the proclamation of true faith. These two wounds are preserved in the post-Tridentine hagiographies. However, the later texts include additional episodes of the saint's martyrdom that do not appear in earlier hagiographies.

According to Wisch (104), the association of Saint Lucy with sight represents a shift from the spiritual light symbolized by her name to the physical light of the sense of vision. Apparently, in the *Canon of Saint Lucy*, composed by Bishop Methodius in the ninth century, she was invoked to illuminate blindness as she bore the name of light. However, prior to this, Saint Lucy was already commemorated alongside Cecilia, Agnes, and Agatha as one of the Wise Virgins, who carried lamps symbolizing the light of their faith. The earliest instance of St. Lucy's miraculous ability to cure blindness, as Wisch (108) comments, seems to be in Venice in 1280, on the "final" translation of her relics, as recounted by local ecclesiastical historians of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Giorgio Polacco and Flaminio Corner. The pictorial evidence, although fragmentary, from the early fourteenth century, supports Wisch's hypothesis: that the translation developed new iconographic attributes linked to sight, which could indicate the convergence of pictorial and visual tradition

Regarding the self-mutilation of her eyes, Wisch's research (117–118) points to a fifteenth-century text, *De claris mulieribus* (1497) by Jacopo Filippo Foresti of Bergamo,

[7] This is, as Gómez Moreno (208) states, how Saint Lucy died, who, according to him, never lost her eyesight. Thus, he echoes the pre-Tridentine hagiographic accounts and Ribadeneyra's doubts regarding Saint Lucy's loss of her eyes, as we will discuss further below. However, on page 253, he refers to the pictorial motif depicting Saint Lucy with her eyes in a container, acknowledging the existence of this tradition.

which explains—after recounting the episodes of the martyrdom—that an unknown author related how Lucy was exceptionally beautiful and that her eyes aroused passions in many men. For this reason, the virgin removed both her eyes to disfigure her face and thereby remain chaste. Wisch also mentions the Carmelite Baptista Spagnoli Mantuanus, who in his *Parthenice* (1502) identifies Judge Pascasius as the man desiring Saint Lucy, prompting her to remove her eyes. The author also cites the Spanish Jesuit Juan de Maldonado (1561; Wisch,126), a source referenced by Villegas, as we shall see below. Furthermore, Maldonado recounts how the Archangel Saint Raphael restores the saint's sight, granting her eyes that are even clearer and more radiant.

In Alonso de Villegas' *Flos Sanctorum*, as is customary in this work, the account of Saint Lucy's life begins with a biblical analogy—specifically, the episode from the *Book of Judges* concerning Captain Gideon's struggle against the Midianites and Christ's battle against demons. Amidst this conflict, the martyrs are portrayed by the author as clay jars that contain light:

> Son figurados los martyres en estos cantaros de barro: porque sus cuerpos eran de barro, y quebrados estos, quando los despedeçauan con los crueles tormentos que les dauan, resplandecia la luz de su via y encendida Fe. Porque esto escierto, que no eran conocidos los Sanctos, como eran luz del mundo, sino en sus muertes. (345)

Villegas' version is the earliest among those we study to reference the self-removal of Saint Lucy's eyes. He states that this story is represented in paintings of the saint and that he draws upon the accounts of Philippo Vergomate and the aforementioned Juan Maldonado. According to these sources, Saint Lucy removed her eyes[8] because a prominent man from her town had fallen in love with her, particularly with her gaze. She then asked a maid to deliver her eyes on a plate to her suitor, who subsequently converted to Christianity. However, the story does not end there:

> No quiso Dios que Lucia quedasse ciega: antes estando un dia en oracion le fue tornada su vista, dandole Dios otros ojos tan buenos y mejores que los que antes auia tenido. (346)

The author explains that the reason this act of self-mutilation does not appear in earlier lives of Saint Lucia is that it was not intended to be taken as an example by the faithful. Although Saint Lucia did not sin, being inspired by the Holy Spirit, anyone who imitated her in this act would indeed commit sin.

Symbolically, the self-blinding of Saint Lucy could represent a profound assertion of agency and autonomy over her own body, achieved through the rejection of her suitor's desire. By removing her eyes, she not only protects her chastity but also exercises control in a cultural context where women's bodies were often subject to male authority. This act can be interpreted as a radical spiritual statement affirming her dedication to God above earthly attachments, emphasizing the triumph of spiritual purity and self-mastery over carnal temptation and social expectations.

In turn, the account by the Jesuit Pedro de Ribadeneyra also includes a digression concerning Saint Lucy's patronage of sight, since "comunmente la pintan con sus ojos en vn plato que tiene en sus manos." (873). However, this author contradicts Villegas's account and

[8] It is not uncommon for female saints to ask God for physical deformities and illnesses to avoid inciting sin in others: this is the case of Saint Liduvina, among others, as recounted by Gómez Moreno (150).

is unaware of the reason why Saint Lucy is depicted in this manner, referring instead to a similar story found in a book entitled *Prado espiritual*:

> La causa de pintarse assi, su historia no la dize: ni tampoco que se aya sacado los ojos por librarse de vn hombre lasciuo que la perseguia, como algunos escriuen. Y el Prado espiritual, que es libro antiguo, y que tiene autoridad, atribuye este hecho a vna donzella de Alexandria. (873)

It might seem here that Ribadeneyra discredits the testimony of those who, like Villegas, attribute Saint Lucy's patronage of sight to her alleged self-mutilation in the face of persecution by a lecherous man. Thus, a narrative tension between the legendary and the truthful is revealed here, which could be explained by the different backgrounds and objectives of both authors. Ribadeneyra, as a Jesuit historian, usually applied more rigorous criteria of documentary verification, privileging historical authenticity over popular tradition. His historiographical training led him to distrust accounts that lacked solid foundation in primitive sources, as demonstrated by his reference to the *Prado espiritual* to attribute the episode of self-mutilation to another Alexandrian martyr. For Ribadeneyra, the absence of this legend in the earliest sources constituted proof of its apocryphal character. In contrast, Villegas, as a theologian and playwright, showed himself more receptive to the pastoral and symbolic value of the legend, even while recognizing its problematic nature.

3.3. Saint Apollonia of Alexandria

Saint Apollonia of Alexandria, patroness of dentists and dental diseases, was a martyr whose feast day is celebrated by the Church on February 9th. Although her story does not appear in the *Flos sanctorum renacentista*, the versions differ significantly before and after the Council of Trent, which makes it difficult to provide a summary of her life as was done for the preceding saints.

In the *Leyenda de los santos*, we are told how the young Saint Apollonia, discovered by her father, the king of Alexandria, to be a Christian, is beaten by the executioners once her father learns of her faith:

> E los dichos ministros por el mandado de su padre la acotaron cruelmente fasta que la sangre salia de su cuerpo: ansi como suele manar el agua dela fuente. (273)

This is the first wound she receives; the following ones are described in vivid detail and are likewise inflicted by order of her father, who, upon seeing that his daughter still refuses to worship the gods, sends for his counselors:

> Tomadla por los cabellos e atormentadla. Por cuyo mandado alos pies de la donzella pusieron cantos muy grandes e de grandissimo peso. E tanto tiraron della fasta que odas las pares de su cuerpo fueron departidas: fasta la facion delos nervios. E esso mismo mando que la ferieran con palos o vergas: en manera que no quedo enella huesso sano de encima de la cabeca fasta la planta del pie [...] "La mando desnudar e peynar con escorpiones de fierro e las carnes suyas ser peynadas e laceradas fasta que se le parescian todas las entrañas e huesos. E como ya quasi desfallesciera por los grandes tormentos el angel la confortara. (274)

Throughout these torments, Saint Apollonia continues to gaze heavenward and offer thanks to God. Subsequently, while his daughter remains imprisoned, the father conceives a new form of torture: to place her bound within a red-hot furnace. However, an angel once again

comes to her aid, and as divine retribution, burns several executioners and blinds others. The next injury inflicted upon Saint Apollonia is the extraction of her teeth, carried out by her father's command: "Mando que truxesen tenazas de fierro: con las quales por mandado suyo le quitaron todos los dientes de su boca sin dexarle alguno de ellos". (274). When he finds himself holding all of his daughter's teeth in his hands, he mockingly inquires where Christ is now, since He has not assisted her. Nevertheless, she opens her mouth and discovers that all her teeth have been restored, appearing more beautiful and whiter than before. Finally, after being paraded throughout the city, Apollonia is beheaded, and from her neck flows milk instead of blood.

According to Chevalier (977), teeth might be a symbol for fame, happiness, hard work and protection, while:

> Toothlessness is the sign of the loss of youth and of the loss of the strength both to attack and to defend oneself: it is a symbol of frustration, castration and bankruptcy. It is the loss of the life force, since healthy, well-furnished jaws are evidence of manly strength and self-confidence.

Upon being deprived of her teeth, Saint Apollonia would symbolically be losing her joy, her good name, her vitality, and her vigor. Teeth also serve as instruments of speech, as well as representatives of physical beauty; therefore, their loss may symbolize the attempt to silence the proclamation of faith, and the detachment from the superficial in order to attain true spiritual beauty.

Alonso de Villegas' version of Saint Apollonia's martyrdom begins with a declaration of the sources from which he draws the narrative: Dionysius, Bishop of Alexandria, and the *Ecclesiastical History* of Eusebius of Caesarea. Subsequently, he warns that the punishment of breaking teeth and molars was originally applied by God to sinners, but that the devil, ever prideful, decided to imitate God and inflict this punishment upon the saints. In this version of the account, the king of Alexandria imprisons Saint Apollonia, though he is not her father; moreover, the martyr is no longer a young maiden but an elderly woman. The historical Saint Apollonia was indeed an elderly deaconess in Alexandria during the persecution under Emperor Philip the Arab (around 249 CE), as recorded by the sources aforementioned. The earlier medieval versions likely transformed her into a young maiden to fit established martyrological patterns and enhance the narrative's emotional and symbolic impact. This shift represents the broader Counter-Reformation emphasis on historical authenticity over purely devotional storytelling.

Her martyrdom in Villegas' *Flos sanctorum* is briefer than in the *Leyenda de los santos*, and once lost, her teeth are not restored. It is also notable that her death occurs by fire rather than by beheading, and furthermore, by her own volition:

> Presa que fue la sancta, persuaden le que adore a los Idolos. Ella negando de hazer lo, lo primero le sacaron los dientes, con grande dolor suyo. Y como ni esto bastasse con ella a que mudasse parecer, encendieron vna grande hoguera y amenazan la que viua la echarian en ella sino haze lo que le dizen. Estuuo la Sancta pensando entre si vn poco, y luego, librando se de las manos de los que la tenian asida, con grande animo se arrojo en el fuego, siendo alli luego muerta y abrasada, Quedaron todos los presentes asssombrados, porque con mas diligencia se offrecio la virgen a la muerte, que los verdugos a darse la. (104-105)

As he did in the life of Saint Lucy, Alonso de Villegas warns us that both self-mutilation and suicide constitute sin "por que nadie es señor de su vida, ni de sus miembros" (105).

However, to justify the act of Saint Apollonia, and of other saints such as the biblical Samson, he cites Saint Augustine, who considers it inspired by the Holy Spirit. The Catholic Church's position on suicide and self-mutilation was firmly established. Nevertheless, the Church recognized that martyrs who chose death rather than apostasy acted under divine inspiration.

Finally, Pedro de Ribadeneyra also begins his account by referencing his source: an epistle of Saint Dionysius of Alexandria referenced by Eusebius of Caesarea in his *Ecclesiastical History*. According to this version of the narrative, the animosity toward Christians in Alexandria is created through demonic arts by a sorcerer, provoking the townspeople to persecute Christians, plunder and burn their houses, torture and murder them. Once again, Saint Apollonia is not a young girl but an elderly woman, whom they sought to persuade to renounce her faith and sacrifice to the gods, but:

> como la santa estuuiesse constante y firme, le dieron muchos golpes, y le quebrantaron las mejillas, y con gran violencia y furor le arrancaron todos los dientes. (212)

As in Villegas, the gentiles build a great bonfire with which they intend to burn the saint alive, but she, on her own initiative, ignited:

> De aquel fuego diuino con que estauan abrasadas sus entrañas, con particular instinto, e impulso de Dios (sin el qual licitamente no se pudiera hazer) corriendo se arrojó en el fuego, del qual fue consumida. (212)

4. Conclusions

This comparative analysis of the hagiographic narratives of Saints Agatha, Lucy, and Apollonia across these four Spanish collections, the most widespread in the transition from the Middle Ages to the Modern Age, has revealed the complex symbolic and cultural functions of corporeal wounds in female Christian martyrdom literature. The examination of these texts from the late medieval period through the Counter-Reformation demonstrates that martyrial wounds operate as multivalent symbolic elements that transcend mere narrative spectacle, functioning instead as instruments of spiritual communication, identity affirmation, and symbolic transgression of patriarchal order.

The central hypothesis of this study has been confirmed: the corporeal wounds inflicted upon female Christian martyrs in Spanish hagiographic literature function as sites of profound symbolic transformation rather than simple expressions of violence. Through the comparative analysis of the martyrdoms of Agatha, Lucy, and Apollonia, we have demonstrated how physical mutilation becomes spiritual elevation, and it creates a paradoxical discourse where apparent powerlessness transforms into spiritual authority. The removal of Agatha's breasts, Lucy's self-inflicted blindness, and Apollonia's dental extraction represent more than isolated acts of violence—they constitute a coherent symbolic system wherein the destruction of feminine corporeal markers facilitates access to masculine spiritual authority. This process reveals how female martyrs transcended prescribed social roles by symbolically abandoning their feminine identity while retaining their biological sex, achieving a liminal status that allowed them to claim divine testimony previously reserved for men.

In addition, the comparative analysis between pre-Tridentine and post-Tridentine texts has revealed significant transformations in the representation of female martyrdom that illuminate broader ecclesiastical and cultural shifts. The evolution from the *Leyenda de los santos* and *Flos sanctorum renacentista* to Villegas' and Ribadeneyra's collections

demonstrates the progressive intensification of torture descriptions[9], reflecting the Council of Trent's emphasis on hagiography's didactic function. Post-Tridentine texts employ increasingly graphic depictions of physical suffering to promote moral discipline and doctrinal conformity: This way, they transform martyrdom narratives into sophisticated instruments of spiritual instruction that serve Counter-Reformation pedagogical objectives. Simultaneously, the enhanced emphasis on historical authenticity in later works demonstrates ecclesiastical concerns with distinguishing legitimate tradition from popular invention, as authors cited patristic sources to establish credibility. The stylistic sophistication of post-Tridentine authors reveals how hagiographic literature adapted to changing rhetorical conventions while maintaining its fundamental spiritual functions through more complex rhetorical strategies and scholarly apparatus.

Each saint's particular wounds could carry distinct symbolic meanings that illuminate broader cultural negotiations about female agency, religious authority, and social order. This way, Agatha's breast removal would function as a radical rejection of reproductive femininity, transforming her from potential mother to spiritual guide, while the reciprocal pattern of injuries between saint and persecutor illustrates how spiritual authority could supersede temporal dominance through the inversion of victim and victor roles. Lucy's self-inflicted blindness might operate as an assertion of bodily autonomy that challenges male desire and social expectation, demonstrating how women could reclaim agency through acts of deliberate self-transformation, while her miraculous preservation of speech emphasizes the triumph of divine testimony over human attempts at silencing female voices. Apollonia's dental extraction may carry particular significance as an attack on the instruments of articulation and symbols of vital force, with the evolution from miraculous restoration to permanent loss across textual versions reflecting changing theological emphases regarding divine intervention versus patient acceptance of suffering.

The analysis confirms theoretical frameworks regarding the revolutionary potential of female martyrdom narratives while revealing their inherent limitations. These texts perform crucial cultural work by creating unprecedented categories of female authority while simultaneously operating within constraints that ultimately served patriarchal religious structures. Spanish hagiographic tradition navigated the intersection of empowerment and subjugation by creating narratives that both challenged and reproduced contemporary gender hierarchies, as female martyrs achieved forms of spiritual masculinity through suffering while their stories continued to emphasize specifically feminine forms of vulnerability and violation. This fundamental ambivalence demonstrates how religious discourse could provide alternative models of female agency while remaining dependent on frameworks of sacrifice and victimization. The transformation of physical pain into spiritual metaphor reveals the sophisticated symbolic systems operating within these texts, as medieval culture developed increasingly complex relationships with violence and suffering that aestheticized brutality while maintaining its redemptive significance. The empowerment of women in hagiography is such that not even the most feminist novelistic formulation can measure up to it, as Gómez Moreno explains (216). The female hagiographic narrative features true heroines: young women of noble birth, radiant beauty, keen intelligence, and exemplary virtue, who contrast with the secondary and passive role of women in romances.

The corpus examined in this study represents crucial moments in the evolution of Spanish religious literature, as it documents the transition from medieval devotional literature to early modern spiritual instruction and reveals how hagiographic discourse adapted to

[9] After the Council of Trent, there was a strong renewed interest in the early Christian martyrs, probably due to the fact that, at that very moment in history, new martyrs were being created, now Catholics. Some sources that illustrate this phenomenon are Vincent-Cassy, Alvar Nuño and Freeman, among others.

changing ecclesiastical requirements while maintaining its fundamental function as a vehicle for cultural negotiation. The literary sophistication evident in post-Tridentine works, particularly their integration of biblical typology, patristic authority, and rhetorical techniques, demonstrates the genre's evolution toward greater complexity and scholarly rigor as authors sought to balance popular appeal with intellectual respectability. The tension between devotional tradition and historical accuracy reflects broader Counter-Reformation concerns about textual authority and doctrinal purity, as ecclesiastical writers increasingly distinguished between legitimate tradition and popular embellishment.

While this study has focused on three paradigmatic figures of female martyrdom, future research could expand the corpus to examine regional variations in Spanish hagiographic tradition and explore the relationship between textual representation and visual iconography to understand how different media constructed meaning around female sanctity. Comparative studies examining similar traditions in other European contexts may illuminate the specifically Spanish characteristics of these narratives.

The study of female Christian martyrs in Spanish hagiographic literature reveals the profound complexity of religious discourse that simultaneously empowered and constrained women within medieval and early modern contexts. The corporeal wounds of Saints Agatha, Lucy, and Apollonia function as sites where competing discourses of female agency, religious authority, and social order were articulated through the dramatic spectacle of sanctified suffering, as their mutilated bodies became focal points of sacred authority that challenged established hierarchies while providing models of female sanctity that transcended conventional gender limitations. This analysis reveals how Spanish hagiographic tradition participated in the broader Christian cultural project of creating new forms of subjectivity and authority, offering alternative models of female empowerment while remaining bounded by their dependence on sacrifice and submission. The enduring appeal of these narratives across centuries of Spanish religious culture testifies to their success in negotiating the fundamental tensions between autonomy and subordination that characterize much of Christian discourse about women and sanctity. The wounds of these martyrs emerge as complex symbolic systems that continue to illuminate the intersections of gender, religion, and power in pre-modern European culture, their legacy extending beyond their historical moment to address enduring questions about the relationship between suffering and authority, agency and submission, and the possibilities and limitations of religious discourse as a vehicle for social transformation.

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