

**DEPICTING THE UNFORGIVABLE SIN:
IMAGES OF SUICIDE IN MEDIEVAL ART**

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ABSTRACT

The pictorial representation of suicide in medieval culture has attracted little scholarly examination. This lacuna stands in contrast to the work of social historians and literary scholars, who have demonstrated the rich potential the subject of suicide holds for study of the Middle Ages. Filling this gap, my dissertation examines the genesis, formal and iconographic developments, and social functions of images of self-killing in early and high medieval art through an analysis of the suicides of Judas Iscariot, King Saul, and Queen Dido in selected artworks from France and Germany. Locating representations of these figures' suicides at the intersection of medieval intellectual and social history, this dissertation reveals how the iconography of suicide in the Middle Ages developed from and embodied complex social, religious, and political attitudes rather than reflecting an unchanging Christian prohibition.

Chapter one charts the emergence of a distinct Christian ethos on suicide and its impact on the visual arts, and explores how this ethos engendered the creation of a negative iconography of suicide based upon the hanging of Judas Iscariot. Chapter two

examines the development of the iconography of Judas' suicide between 800 and 1150 in illuminated manuscripts and French Romanesque architectural sculpture, probing the relationship between the image and religious thought and exegesis, liturgical ritual, and eleventh- and twelfth-century discourses over simony. Chapter three reveals how the image of King Saul's suicide was a subject of particular interest to royal Carolingian and Capetian patrons, who employed the image as part of their visual rhetoric of kingship. Chapter four examines the medieval reception history of the pictorial and literary image of the suicide of Queen Dido, arguing that twelfth-century French and German vernacular translations of Virgil's *Aeneid* inspired in thirteenth-century manuscript illustration a renewed interest in portraying her death. Chapter five summarizes the dissertation's conclusions, and is followed by three iconographic appendices recording all known images of the suicides of Judas, Saul, and Dido in medieval art to the year 1400. As this dissertation demonstrates, if suicide were considered an unforgivable sin in the Middle Ages, it was by no means an unrepresentable one.