The Exuding Wood of the Cross at Isenheim

Gregory C. Bryda

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Ice thaws on the river, ice melts on the streams,
They are freed again as the spring sun gleams.
The valley is green with new life, new hopes;
Old winter is beaten—see how it withdrew
To skulk up there on rough mountain-slopes! . . .
They have something today to celebrate,
For the Lord’s resurrection is theirs as well:
Today they have risen and been set free
From the mean damp houses where they dwell,
From their trades and crafts and drudgery. . . .

—Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, “Easter Stroll,” from Faust (1808)

A miraculously vegetating cross figures prominently in the story of the founding of the Hospital Brothers of Saint Anthony. According to tradition, the eleventh-century Lord Gaston of the Dauphiné received a vision after his son Guérin was cured of the debilitating affliction known as Saint Anthony’s fire. A long-deceased Egyptian hermit saint, Anthony appeared to Gaston and instructed him to plant a tau cross, which subsequently bore fruit that contained healing powers. The saint’s principal attribute, the Greek letter tau (τ), was thought to possess magical properties, and the Antonines, who specialized in nursing the physical and mental symptoms of Saint Anthony’s fire, ascribed it with “power” (potentia) in a bull of 1297 and emblazoned their black habits with large tau crosses. Its obscure origins, tied both to the Hebrew “sign” (tav) that marked those spared the plague in the Old Testament (Ezekiel 9:6) and its resemblance to the miraculous crutch that supported Saint Anthony in the Egyptian desert, the magic tau derived its effectiveness from the holiest of all crosses, the one on which Christ was crucified.

Like Gaston’s fructuating tau, which compelled his son and him to establish the order’s first hospice in 1095, the potentia of Christ’s Cross revealed itself throughout the Middle Ages as the bounty of nature’s seasonal transformations. Centuries after the order’s founding, inscribed prints beseeched their readers to meditate on an image of Christ crucified on a tau cross sprouting golden leaflets to help ward off pestilence (Fig. 1). At the same time that these apotropaic pictures circulated around southern Germany in the fifteenth century, writers and artists began to conceive of the cross as living flora whose essential tissues and saps could be exploited for medicinal and other salutary purposes. As evidenced by a series of late medieval garden allegories, not previously examined in art history, the devotional trope of the cross’s exuding wood served as the theological basis for the well-known Antonine altarpiece at Isenheim sculpted by Nikolaus Hagenauer between 1490 and 1493 and painted by Matthias Grünewald in 1512–15 (Figs. 2–4). From the holiest spot of their church on the high altar, the Antonine monks at Isenheim expressed in their multimedia retable a trenchant awareness of the symbolic and material relevance of trees and vegetation, whose viscous essences they prescribed for patients at their adjacent infirmary.

Vegetation was always fertile ground for Christological symbolism. Theologians such as Saint Bonaventure (1221–1274) popularized Christ’s Cross as a diagrammatic “tree of life” (Lignum vitae), whose branches charted the events of his life and sacrifices. Mystical writers
like Henry Suso (1295–1366) saw in blooming roses the beauty of Christ’s wounds, pain, and torment. In fifteenth-century German-speaking lands, though, artistic and verbal accounts of the Passion truly reveled in extended vegetal metaphors. Writing under a mystical genre known as the Spiritual Woods (*Geistliche Maien*), figures like the Dominican Johannes Kreutzer from Alsace (d. 1468) and the Franciscan Stephan Fridolin of Nuremberg (d. 1498), among numerous unknown authors, began to expound on the biology of the metaphors’ living subjects, rather than using them solely as allegories or mnemonic devices. Emanating from the Living Wood (*das lebendige Holz*), the archetypal plant on which Christ suffered and bled, a spiritual ecosystem of medicinal herbs, plants, and flowers assumed sacred relevance for their essential properties as mutable organisms (Fig. 5). Working from this rich medieval literary tradition, Goethe immortalized in his “Easter Stroll” (*Osterspaziergang*) of 1808 the manner in which dormant plants blossoming in the spring gave visual, tactile, and olfactory credence to the concept of the Resurrection.

First identified with the cosmic Tree of Life from Genesis, then the Tree of Love from mystical-bride commentaries on the Song of Songs (*Arbor amoris, or der Minnebaum*), and the heavenly sprig blossoming into a tree over Adam’s grave, as recited from the Golden Legend, the Spiritual Woods became an entrenched metaphor that extended from the wood of the cross to Christ’s body as the life-giving fruit hanging from it (Fig. 6). In eliding the redemptive power of Christ and the divine tree, the wood of the cross topos opened itself to the possibility for additional degrees of anatomical similitude between the God-man bleeding from his veins and the scarred wood exuding resins onto its bark. “Overflowing” and fertilizing the earth’s crust with this admixture of sacro-biological

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4 Matthias Grünewald and Nikolaus Hagenauer, Isenheim Altarpiece, final opening, reconstructed, 1512–15 and 1490–93, tempera and oil on wood, polychrome limewood. Musée Unterlinden, Colmar (artwork in the public domain; photograph © Musée Unterlinden, Dist. RMN–Grand Palais/Art Resource, NY)
effluvia, the redemptive materiality of the tree-cross planted at the center of Paradise streams to earth and all of God’s verdant creative bounty. Greening the conventional Neoplatonic syntax of mystical emanation, the spiritual writers suffused their Passion narratives with an earthiness whereby plants and herbs portray the supporting details, and the wood figures prominently at the center.

The greenery of vegetation is in fact historical language. Recognizing the humor that courses through plants and naming it their *viriditas*, or greenness, Hildegard of Bingen (d. 1179) understood that it was their essential effluvia that kept plants fresh, leafy, and vibrant. I thus employ the words “vegetation” and “greenery” deliberately, for they are the best approximations in English of the now antiquated word *Maien/Meyen*, which in medieval German stood more generally for all of the earth’s flora. Spiritual Woods, or Greenery, a concept that originated with the mendicant orders in the domain of female piety but was popular among lay audiences long after 1500, came to represent trees, vines, and herbs as both subject and medium.

I thus accounted for the sacred potential of nature’s outer appearance as well as the humors, secretions, and other salutary qualities of its organisms in perpetual flux, from growth to human intervention: vines cultivated for the Eucharistic wine, plants’ saps drained for salves dedicated to saints, and the exuding Edenic Tree lumbered to fashion the True Cross. In its various botanical representations, the Spiritual Woods thus also offered an extended horticultural vocabulary in which to frame the violence perpetrated against Christ on the Cross.

Graphic accounts of Christ’s ultimate sacrifice had indeed inspired artists and writers for centuries, though none quite like the south German Mathis Gothart Nithart, better known as Matthias Grünewald. A prolific master painter working in the first three decades of the sixteenth century on mainly religious subjects, Grünewald was unmatched in his preoccupation with the Crucifixion, which appears more than any other iconography in his surviving corpus. For one, his eclectic depictions of Christ’s chief torture device exemplify his knowledge, as a hydraulics engineer and trained carpenter, of numerous methods of joining pieces of timber (Fig. 7). In addition to his artistic commissions, Grünewald was solicited throughout Germany and Alsace for his expertise in plumbing. His familiarity with carpentry and horticulture creeps into all of his artwork, from his display of construction methods to his fastidious representation of plant species. In formally cross listing his paintings with illustrations in medieval building treatises and pharmacopoeia, though, Lottlisa Behling and others have privileged optical art historical approaches and overlooked how Grünewald, like the spiritual writers of his time, embraced the multiple semantic registers afforded by the living conditions of wood and vegetation.

For example, he haphazardly built the crossbars in his Crucifixion for the Holy Cross Church of Tauberbischofsheim, crudely chopping their ends and only partially planing their surfaces flat to set off the wood’s bark; he also captured the pulpy, pliable texture of lumber in the roughly hacked foot block, or *suppedaneum* (Fig. 8). But his display of expertise with natural materials is not limited to the timber of the Cross; it extends to his heightened attention to the living wood of other botanical *arma Christi*, such as the crown of thorns and the birches, which can be found on the reverse side of the bilateral panel (Fig. 9). The same is true for his now-lost Crucifixion that Christoph Krafft copied in about 1648 (Fig. 10). Grünewald painted it as a tree trunk shorn of its branches but still firmly rooted in the ground. The crossbar and wooden ladder appear as unrefined logs. As Christ is portrayed from the back to highlight the lamentation of Mary Magdalene, his face is not seen. Barely suspended from the ground, his body in its streaky coloration parallels the surface of the adjoining tree-cross. However, in the winged altarpiece Grünewald painted for the Antonine monks at Isenheim (Figs. 2, 12), the largest painted Crucifixion in northern Europe to survive from this period,
5 Spiritual May Pole, title page of the Geistlicher Maibaum, Ulm, ca. 1482, woodcut, 5 5/8 × 4 7/8 in. (14.2 × 11.8 cm). Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich, 2 Inc.s.a. 139, 147a (artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, published under fair use)

6 Christ on the Tree-Cross, from Geiler von Kaysersberg, De xii excellentiis arboris Crucifixi, Strasbourg, 1514, woodcut, 6 1/4 × 5 3/4 in. (15.8 × 13.2 cm). Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich, Res/2 Rlat. 884, fol. 35a (artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, published under fair use)

7 Matthias Grünewald, Christ on the Cross, ca. 1520, charcoal, white heightening, and ink on paper, 21 × 12 3/4 in. (53.9 × 32.5 cm). Staatliche Kunsthalle, Karlsruhe (artwork in the public domain; photograph by Wolfgang Pankoke and Elvira Beick, provided by bpk Bildagentur/Art Resource, NY)
Matthias Grünewald, Crucifixion, from the Tauberbischofsheim Altarpiece (obverse), 1523–25, tempera and oil on panel, 77 1/8 × 56 1/4 in. (196 × 143 cm). Staatliche Kunsthalle, Karlsruhe (artwork in the public domain; photograph by Wolfgang Pankoke, provided by bpk Bildagentur/Art Resource, NY)

Matthias Grünewald, Christ Carrying the Cross, from the Tauberbischofsheim Altarpiece (reverse), 1523–25, tempera and oil on panel, 77 1/8 × 56 1/4 in. (196 × 143 cm). Staatliche Kunsthalle, Karlsruhe (artwork in the public domain; photograph by Wolfgang Pankoke and Ellen Frank, provided by bpk Bildagentur/Art Resource, NY)

Christoph Krafft, after Matthias Grünewald, The Lamentation of the Magdalene, ca. 1648, oil on canvas, 61 × 30 in. (156 × 76 cm). Sammlung Wurth, Kurzelsau (artwork in the public domain; photograph by Horst Ziegenfusz, published under fair use)
Grünewald called even greater attention to the arboreal Corpus Christi. Beyond Christ’s tawny-green complexion, the perforations of his excoriated flesh, as Andrée Hayum has noted, intimate the patterns of tree bark.22 What the Spiritual Woods texts and Grünewald’s painting make clear, moreover, is that the corollary to Christ’s formal semblance to the metaphoric tree is his containment of its salvific resins and turpentines, which, like the blood of a human body, are extracted through injury to a tree’s bark. Exploited figuratively as a parallel for the sacramental blood Christ shed on the Cross, tree exudates like resin and turpentine formed the basis of medieval medicine and, most important, were prescribed by the Isenheim monks to treat skin pustules and boils and soothe the burning sensations associated with Saint Anthony’s fire.23 Stretching across two panels, then, Christ’s body suffering on the Ur-tree at Isenheim opens up and emanates in the botanical reimaginings of Christ and the Cross in the subsequent unfurlings of the altarpiece’s wings, which culminate in the gilded wooden sculpture of the enthroned Anthony sitting beneath a leafy canopy (Fig. 4).24 These and other features of Grünewald’s compositions tend to be overshadowed by the disturbing degree to which the artist portrayed Christ’s mangled body on the Cross. His Tauberbischofsheim Crucifixion was considered so unsightly in the nineteenth century that the clergy had it removed in 1875 and replaced with a wooden crucifix.25 Previous art historical explanations of Grünewald’s gruesome innovations have relied on much of the same exegetical literature cited to explain the appearance of violent sculpted crucifixes emerging out of the Rhineland about 1300 (Fig. 11). Some even suggest that the wooden sculptures themselves, which were more than two centuries old at the time, were points of influence for Grünewald.26 In his volume on German sculpture, Wilhelm Pinder placed the painter at the culmination of a continuum initiated by the famous depiction of Christ on the branchy cross (Astkreuz) from Cologne’s Santa Maria im Kapitol. Its “novel realization of an interior process . . . is horrible, like from a first Grünewald, pulled apart, hunched, tattered, torn, bent, and contorted.”27 Writing in a nationalistic manner in the years leading up to World War I, Pinder prized Grünewald’s expressionistic style as emblematic of an “irrational” Gothic temperament endemic to the German nation.28 Not long after Pinder’s publication, the altarpiece became a cause célèbre for Germans, who, a year before the war’s end, transferred it from the politically fraught border region of Alsace to Munich for cleaning and display.29 In the short interim from November 1918 to September 1919 at the Alte Pinakothek, the reexhibited Isenheim Altarpiece enthralled the public and made an indelible impact on Otto Dix, Max Ernst, George Grosz, and Thomas Mann, to name a few.30

Stipulated by the Treaty of Versailles in 1919 to return to its Alsatian home, which itself passed back into French hands, the altarpiece continued to be absorbed into disparate ideologies, from the Expressionist movement in art to existentialist philosophy and even Reformed theology.31 In fact, some have argued that because a copy of Martin Luther’s sermons is listed among Grünewald’s personal effects after his death in 1528, the artist himself may have sympathized with the Reform movement.32 Surely, Grünewald must have had to nimbly negotiate the fragmented political terrain of German-speaking territories in the aftermath of Luther’s activism. The works he painted for the Antonines at Isenheim and the church of Tauberbischofsheim, however, were never designed to contend with encroaching Protestantism but rather represent the tail end of a long continuum of unabated medieval traditions—a period that Germans call das ausgehende Mittelalter (the waning Middle Ages). Notwithstanding the paintings’ modern receptions, Grünewald’s particular meditation on the torment inflicted on Christ fits squarely with popular, late medieval, markedly horticultural variations of Holy Cross mysticism.33
THE GREENNESS OF HOLY CROSS MYSTICISM

The mystic Saint Bridget of Sweden (d. 1373) is generally credited with influencing Grünewald’s graphic Crucifixions. The similarities are indeed unmistakable:

The crown of thorns was impressed on his head; it was pushed down firmly covering half of his forehead, and the blood, gushing forth from the prickling of thorns, ran down in many rills over his face, hair, and beard so that it seemed like a river of blood. . . . The color of death spread through his flesh, and after he breathed his last human breath, his mouth gaping open so that one could see his tongue, his teeth, and the blood in his mouth. The dead body sagged. His knees then contracted bending to the side. His feet were cramped and twisted about the nails of the cross as if they were on hinges. . . . The cramped fingers and arms were stretched out painfully.34

Bridget was herself indebted to older imaginings of Christ’s martyrdom and very much operated in the same mystical milieu as such contemporaries as Suso. These immersive extrapolations of Christ’s torment on the Cross are consistent with Grünewald’s Crucifixions, but they account for only part of the picture.

Running parallel to the texts inspired by Saint Bridget’s visions was a fifteenth-century wave of “May devotion” (Maiandacht) that viewed natural greenery as a mirror of Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross.35 Spiritual writers working in this mode literalized conventional religious figures into familiar accounts of real-life practice in botany, agriculture, and medicine.36 Synchronized with the liturgical feasts of the Holy Cross’s Invention (May 3) and Elevation (September 14), a pair of devotional topoi called the Geistliche Maien and Geistliche Herbst allegorized mankind’s seasonal celebration and exploitation of nature at the moment of its sprouting on the vernal and autumnal equinoxes, when the beauty of Christ’s wounds, pain, and torment was revealed in blooming flowers and fructuating tree branches. The illustrated text The Spiritual May Pole (Geistlicher Maibaum) from Ulm, printed about 1482, which at once allegorizes the Cross as the prized tree local townspeople celebrated on May Day, also emphasizes the biological properties of Christ’s instrument of death (Fig. 5).37 Christ is “harshly stretched over the rawness of the untrimmed wood of the cross . . . the joyful and beautiful wood, the wood of life with its sublime branches and pluckable, tender blossoms bearing perfect fruit and eternal nourishment.”38 But the anonymous author of the Geistlicher Maibaum also incorporates Christ’s body into the arboreal metaphor. His arms wrench widely apart, his two holy legs woven together, and his two hands compared to green leaves, Christ takes the physical shape of a nest, in which the reader’s soul is planted and in which many weak, yearning birds seek refuge, flying up the wood to feed from its—and thus Christ’s—rose-colored, redemptive fruit.39

Better known for his Schatzbehalter of 1491, which was printed by Anton Koberger and illustrated with ninety-six woodcuts by Michael Wolgemut, the preacher Stephan Fridolin wrote his own springtime devotional treatise, which is called Der geistliche Mai. Unlike the anonymous Swabian author, Fridolin tailored his Passion allegory for a female audience—namely, the Franciscan nuns of Saint Clare in Nuremberg, to whom he served as confessor from the 1480s until his death in 1498.40 Furthermore, throughout Der geistliche Mai he imbued the metaphorical language with the kind of well-informed and empirically tested pharmacological knowledge that was compiled and printed out of Mainz at the very same moment in the late fifteenth century.41 Weaving science and religion together, Fridolin sanctified countless plant species, like the medicinal sage, as mirrors for the various episodes of the Passion:

The sage leaf is bristly and long and has many tiny stems. In it, contemplate the nature of the garden virginal body [of Christ] on the column. . . . In the plurality of the sage

13 THE EXUDING WOOD OF THE CROSS AT ISENHEIM
leaf’s tiny veins, contemplate how in the brutal flagellation the saintly veins of Christ were so brutally ruptured, that his rose-colored blood streamed abundantly, without obstruction, out of all his veins and all his limbs.\footnote{42}

For these authors, who liken the fluids and even the circulatory system of Christ and his vegetal stand-ins, the resemblance between Christ and the earthly symbols is indeed physical and material. Collapsing the gap between sacred history and metaphor, they attribute the fecundity of nature to the generative force of Christ’s and the Spiritual Woods’ vital liquids and inner saps, which soak into and fertilize the earth.\footnote{43} Grünewald’s Tauberbischofsheim Crucifixion, first mentioned by the French novelist Joris-Karl Huysmans in 1904, plainly illustrates this principle (Fig. 8). The blood dribbling down the wood of the Cross amasses in a large red pool in the painting’s foreground.\footnote{44} Emanating from the red primordial sludge, a mossy green layer of grass coats the hills receding into the dark horizon.

With the written word, Fridolin and his contemporaries also strove to capture the Christological materiality of vegetation. Fridolin’s biological approach to Holy Cross mysticism in fifteenth-century Germany, though every bit as graphic as Saint Bridget’s exegesis, delights in the physical harmonies between the wood of the Cross and Christ’s own body. Where Fridolin, in particular, differs from Saint Bridget and her direct adherents is the grounds for his deployment of violent imagery—namely, that Christ’s torment on the Cross yielded material medicines to battle common spiritual and physical ailments.\footnote{45} Throughout his treatise, Fridolin assigned plants metaphoric roles in Christ’s Passion based on their formal resemblance to narrative figures and the parts of the body they were known to treat. The crown of thorns thus suited Fridolin’s chapter on migraines, which he interpreted as the physical manifestation of the sin of pride or bullheadedness (Hoffart and Eigensinnigkeit).\footnote{46} With his crowning, Fridolin commented, “Christ shows with his works the medicinal herbs that you need when your sickness of leprous pride is so great and incurable.”\footnote{47} He then launched into extended comparisons between the thorns used to draw the blood from Christ’s head and the specific plant species, like the “prickly” thistle and prunella, whose saps herbal books like the Gart der Gesundheit had prescribed to alleviate headache.\footnote{48}

The blurring of symbolic and effectual vegetation is a hallmark of Fridolin’s treatise and also proves a useful framework for analyzing the originality of Grünewald’s renderring of corporeal mutilation in his Crucifixions for Isenheim and Tauberbischofsheim. For all their graphic attention to detail, the writings of Bridget and those following in her wake do not account for the unique gangrened coloration Grünewald gave Christ’s skin, whose entire surface, from wrist to ankle, is punctured by stray twigs. The reverse side of the Tauberbischofsheim altar, which Grünewald painted with a large-scale representation of Christ carrying the Cross to Golgotha, adumbrates some of the Crucifixions’ formal eccentricities (Fig. 9). A torturer at the top right, whose face is hidden by the Cross’s lateral beam, brandishes the birches (Birkenrute) with a tightly clenched fist. The sprigs splintered off into Christ’s corpse on the obverse side of the Tauberbischofsheim retable and in the Isenheim Crucifixion are therefore lingering indications of his flagellation (Fig. 12); they are also visual reminders of the earthly stock of the instruments wielded to inflict pain and make him bleed.

Grünewald adorned the architrave on the upper register of his Christ struck by the birches with a verse from Isaiah 53 on the so-called Man of Sorrows (“Er ist umb unser sund willen gesclagen” (he was bruised for our sins)).\footnote{49} In it, the prophet compared the forsaken Lord to an unassuming “rod [virga/die Rute]” sprouting from the dry ground. Seizing the horticultural potential of the same passage in Isaiah, Fridolin drew on the symbolic, medicinal, and linguistic resonance of the quince (in medieval German, die Kute). He also invoked
the eroticism of fruit trees in the Song of Solomon to convey the mystical marriage between nuns and Christ, their bridegroom. “As the apple tree among the trees of the woods, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow, whom I desired: and his fruit was sweet to my palate” (Song of Songs 2:3). In the surrogate of a crestfallen Mary, who witnessed and shared in her son’s death as he uttered his last words on the Cross, Fridolin beseeched his female readers to enter the spiritual tree garden and admire the burgeoning quince. Unlike a tall, vigorous tree, the quince stands inconspicuously low to the ground. A humble variety, the quince figures in Fridolin’s Passion allegory as the array of arma Christi, from the Cross to the crown of thorns, whip, and scourge. Its rough skin concealed by a wooliness that should be rinsed off, the quince fruit hangs unrecognizably from the branch just as the maimed body of the Man of Sorrows, as foretold by Isaiah, hangs from the Cross.

Participating formally in Christ’s sacrifice, the quince is not merely an object to behold but also a thing to bring about change. In the spirit of the battered Christ crying out to his Father, Fridolin’s readers should pulverize, juice, and mix the quince with honey to form an electuary (latuwergen), or a drug in slurry form applied specifically to the teeth, tongue, or gums. Here, again, we see vegetal symbols rooted in the tree of the cross and the Song of Solomon materialize in real plants, whose healing effects are structurally related to features of the Passion story. In this episode, the mouth is the site of the physical and spiritual congruence between Christ gasping for air, howling from the tree-cross, and the restorative quince paste, which contemporary herbals prescribed for asthmatics short of breath. Adding to the symbolic beauty in the Passion’s savagery, Fridolin brought out the performative pharmacology found in it. In the case of Grünewald’s Isenheim Crucifixion, the violation of Christ’s body in turn made possible the soothing of bodies ailing in Isenheim’s infirmary.

Grünewald’s use of color also reflects the elaborate arboreal metaphors for Christ that were circulating at this time. Propped up over the composition’s center, the Isenheim Christ, saliently painted in earth tones, stands apart from the brightly draped figures flanking him (Fig. 2). A sign of his premature decay on the Cross, his tawny-green complexion also harmonizes with the mossy escarpment and the muddy riverbed of the landscape behind him. Perhaps an allusion to his baptism in the Jordan, the river also parallels the spring that gave rise to the Spiritual Woods, in whose biospiritual essence the Corpus Christi is here formally enmeshed. As has already been mentioned, Grünewald captioned his fallen Christ from Tauberbischofsheim with the same Isaiah chapter that Fridolin cited to liken the body of the Man of Sorrows to the uncomely quince tree. On the reverse side of that altarpiece and in the Isenheim Crucifixion, the prophesied tree shows the trauma from blows to it, in a way that closely resembles Fridolin’s allegory of Christ as the bruised hanging fruit. “The quince’s color is pale and yellow; in that recognize the abject form of your most beloved Lord, how he has been tapered and has yellowed, how his lucid eyes are so deeply planted in his head… his rosy red mouth whitened, his delightful face paled and his ever holy and virginal flesh yellowed and blued as the color of death.” From a distance, yellows dominate, but on closer scrutiny at Isenheim, blues appear as the bruising around the numerous raw abrasions to his skin, as well as in his eye sockets and especially the famously livid mouth, whose white highlights also correspond to Fridolin’s botanical exegesis (Fig. 12).

A sign of his loss of circulation, the dark blue lips and eyes recall those afflicted with Saint Anthony’s fire, whose ravaged, gangrenous limbs “blackened like charcoal.” The lips and eyes also hark back to what spiritual writers described as the black conglutination of blood, sweat, and tears concentrated on the face of Christ at his Passion. Fridolin, in his Spiritual Woods, argued for the medicinal value of pitch, which is a term used interchangeably for resinous substances like turpentine seeping from coniferous trees (Baumpech/Pechtanne) or crevices
As part of a section dedicated to the Christological May Bath, Fridolin wove arboreal pitch into his horticultural portrayal of the Crucifixion. Pitch heals the most incurable of diseases because of its comparability to Christ’s precious blood, but it is also by its very nature an earthly material that derives from trees. Likewise, the anonymously written *Geistlicher Maibaum* revels in the dark color and textural properties of pitch. Its semiliquidity mirrors the sweat, tears, bone marrow, and coagulated blood “pitchified” (gepachen) with the Jewish spittle and dust flowing around Christ’s mouth. Associated with Jews (Judenpech/Judenleym) because the best variety was thought to have come from the Dead Sea, mineral pitch—which in the Middle Ages was thought to have ultimately derived from tree resin—was also collected locally throughout northern Europe. In fact, it served as a strong symbol of Alsatian identity in the Middle Ages. The Abbey of Lampertsloch, located in the same region as Isenheim’s monastery, bestowed on its pilgrims samples of this liquid earth. In addition to its common application to skin blisters and boils, pitch was prescribed in the *Gart der Gesundheit* to alleviate dental discomfort, which calls to mind Christ’s blackened
mouth and the paste that Fridolin mixed from the quince tree he envisioned as his Christ and his arma. But Christ’s saliently dark lips at Isenheim speak to the altarpiece’s local premise of the medicinal redemption from Saint Anthony’s fire that was assured in Christ’s death on the wood of the cross. While the oldest surviving recipe for the Isenheim chapter’s Anthoniensalbe dates from May 1662, its primary ingredients are consistent with numerous topical balsams predating Grünewald’s painted panels: “2 pounds of pitch resin and a quarter of turpentine.”

**RESIN IN MEDICINAL AND ARTISTIC PRACTICE**

Beyond the significance of the injuries to his face, the punctuated abrasions on the rest of Christ’s excoriated flesh intimate the pattern of the bark that runs vertically in line with Christ’s lips and along the right edge of his tree-cross (Fig. 12). A striated, twisting, earth-toned trunk, Christ’s body culminates in a head woven in thorns and fingers at the ends of his limbs branching toward God above. Indeed, Grünewald’s exceptional choice to relentlessly accentuate Christ’s suffering under the scourge by littering his entire crucified corpus with its branchy remnants had the distinct visual effect of conflating him with it, for the sharp twigs pierce into but also protrude out of him.

Sapwood, as opposed to the dead inner heartwood, is quite literally the living wood of the tree, channeling the nutrient-filled sap from the tree’s roots to its branches; as the tree’s vascular exoskeleton, it provides the flexible rigidity necessary to hoist and guide foliage toward the best conditions for capturing light and air. When trees are injured, deposits of fats and resins in its veins rupture, and their extracellular contents exude onto the bark. Hardening into a vitreous mass on evaporation, resin in its tawny liquid state is often referred to as turpentine. In the Middle Ages, the term “turpentine” was synonymous with the resin of the proper Mediterranean terebinth tree and European deciduous conifers.

Art historians have pointed out how medieval wood-carvers tended to the organic properties of trees in their artistic production process. We can build on Michael Baxandall’s study of limewood as an inert carving medium to consider wood’s own material fluxes, which were harvested for numerous purposes, chief among them for surgery and for painting. But artists also exploited the living, transforming tree for its metaphoric potential. And the resin, which coursed through its veins and erupted on its surface when the bark was scarred, posed interesting possibilities for wood as subject and medium in religious images of this period.

The extraction of crude turpentine from trees was commonplace in Europe; the procedure is particularly well illustrated throughout the Middle Ages within a rich tradition of northern European medical treatises that date back to the twelfth century and were inspired by the ancient Materia medica of Dioscorides. A standard reference book, the Book of Simple Medicines (Livre des simples médecines) survives in a great number of extant copies. Under the entry for turpentine, they all include a miniature of entire trees, from root to leaf, accompanied by standing farmers who ladle the tree’s exuding resins into barrels that they either carry or rest on the ground (Fig. 13).
Just as these herbal books illustrate extrusion and the Spiritual Woods texts describe it in words, Grünewald depicted Christ’s body on the Cross as drained and wrung out of its resinous blood (Fig. 12). Like the resin of an exuding tree, the blood never spurts into the air but rather trickles down Christ’s skin. Red secretions dribble from the cuts in his forehead across his chin, while a wide cinnabar stream percolates out of his side wound and over the folds of his contorted torso. The focal point of Christ’s oozing blood, however, is the foot of the Cross, where Grünewald concentrated more of his creative energies (Fig. 14). Walther Karlz Zülch underscored the shocking effect of the gigantic iron nail pounded through Christ’s feet: “the Isenheim cross is like a drawn crossbow on which Christ’s body was stretched: should the nail be released, he would be catapulted to heaven.”

The anonymous author of the Geistlicher Maibaum meditated at length over the nail boring through Christ’s feet; likewise, the inscription above the giant nail formed on the devotional woodcut of the vegetating tau cross pointedly mentions the “length and shape” of the Nagel Christi (Fig. 1). By placing Christ’s feet at a remove from the suppedaneum meant to support them, Grünewald cleverly illustrates the nail’s injury to Christ and the tree of the cross. Gathered into droplets under his soles and at the ends of his toes, the blood also collects around the body of the nail and appears to flow independently from the puncture in the wood. Separating into two streams, the blood that hangs in suspended animation becomes an index of temporality. Pooled from streams down his entire body, it now exists in two tones: fresh vermilion and congealed lake.

In addition to two tones of color, Grünewald differentiated the coagulated blood with an impasto application of the darker pigment, which appears as bas-relief globules on the otherwise smooth panel. To build up such a thick glaze, he increased the ratio of medium to pigment—likely with unusually high proportions of tree resin in his paint mixture—which would have rendered the original texture and appearance of the congealed blood as more vitreous and translucent than is visible today. We know artists purchased many of their supplies from apothecaries, where resins were readily available for craftsmen and physicians alike. While Leonardo da Vinci was the first artist to mention it by name, historians have long assumed that Early Netherlandish masters like Jan van Eyck made use of distilled volatile solvents like oil of turpentine to thin paint to a more manageable consistency; because oil of turpentine required distillation, it may be inferred from Giorgio Vasari’s accusation that Jan van Eyck engaged in alchemy that he employed the paint thinner as part of his illusory technique. With his paintbrush, then, Grünewald blended metaphor and practice, for the blood and resin fuse substantially and representationally at the point of contact between the body of Christ and the wood of the cross.

Moreover, in this lower register, in the beholder’s direct view, Grünewald most audaciously asserted the sacrality of the tree-Christ’s exudations in his compositional equation of three holy humors: blood, wine, and balsam (Fig. 2). Parallel to the blood dripping from the
Cross's chunky suppedaneum, the blood that pours into the wine chalice originates curiously from the throat of John the Baptist's lamb as well as the long stem of the stick-cross it carries. Closing the formal triangle on the other side of Christ's feet, Mary Magdalene's balsam jar, which she brought to anoint Christ's dead body (Mark 16:1), would have been assumed to contain the same kind of aromatic tree resins that were allegorized as his divine blood. Derived from the story of the nameless prostitute who came to Jesus with an alabaster jar of perfume in the house of Simon the Pharisee (Luke 7:37), the Magdalene's painted ceramic pot in the Isenheim Crucifixion resembles the medical flasks found in contemporary depictions of working pharmacists (Fig. 15). Indeed, her association with curative balsams persisted beyond the Gospel accounts of Christ's death. Legend maintains that after her flight to France and missionary work in Marseille, she retired to the massif of Provence and lived in a hilltop grotto, which, by the twelfth century, came to be known as Sainte-Baume (Holy Balm). Widely circulated medical recipes like the “Balsam of Marseille” were printed in southern Germany at the time and dedicated to Mary Magdalene; it lists the essential volatile oil of a lavender bush as its active ingredient. 80 True balsam, like Mecca myrrh or balm of Gilead, which are mentioned throughout Scripture, came from the Commiphora opobalsamum shrubs of the Middle East and would have been rare in medieval Europe. 81 Instead, the words “balm” or “balsam” would have been used to describe the viscous secretions from a variety of local plants, most notably turpentine from conifer trees.

The unusual placement of the balsam, usually carried by the Magdalene or Nicodemus, at the foot of the Crucifixion at Isenheim, endows it with Christological significance. Besides the commonplace Eucharistic symbol of wine or juice from grapes, notably in images of Christ in the Wine Press, Grünewald’s composition asserts tree exudations as an additional effluvia mirror for Christ’s redemptive body and blood. 82 Like the wine the priest would consecrate at the altar, the salve participated in church ritual not merely as a symbol but also as a tangible conductor of the salvific power of Christ and his saints. For the Antonine monks at Isenheim, who were tasked with nursing those afflicted with Saint Anthony’s fire and other ailments, the order’s eponymous balsam of pitch resin and turpentine manifested spiritual treatment in physical form.

Since all Antonine monks took an oath to treat patients exhibiting the markers of Saint Anthony’s fire, they would have known how to handle resin. Since antiquity, turpentine had been used as an analgesic and adhesive plaster for skin abrasions. 83 Surgical texts from the spectrum of Latin-based medical centers across Europe, including those from the Italian- and French-trained Henri de Mondeville and Guy de Chauliac of the fourteenth century, are in total agreement about the role of tree exudates in the treatment of wounds. 84

Produced nearby and at the time of the Isenheim Altarpiece’s commission, the German vernacular writings of Hieronymus Brunschwig (ca. 1450–ca. 1512) are representative of the handwritten texts of preceding generations. Known mostly for his research on the art of distillation, Brunschwig published his Book on Surgery in Augsburg in 1497 with the subtitle Handiwerk of Wound Pharmacopoeia (Handwirckung der wundarzney), which encapsulates his interventional approach to repairing injuries to the human body. 85 In his seventh volume on medicinal simples, Brunschwig instructed his readers on the making of topical emollients and salves. As the chapter’s woodcut frontispiece illustrates, pharmacists simmered and stirred their ingredients (Fig. 15); a shelf carries flasks for their elixirs, which are reminiscent of the Magdalene’s jar at Isenheim. Known also by the Latin term diachylon (or “through extraction”), Brunschwig’s
wound plasters comprised several different plant juices and, in the vast majority of cases, exudates of local trees, like the fir and spruce (Terbentim, Weiβ viechten dannenhars).  

As arcane as Brunschwig’s excursus may seem, resin’s value in the field of medicine was commonplace knowledge across Europe throughout the Middle Ages and early modern period. The expert physician Hans von Gersdorff, who conducted hundreds of amputations at the Antonine hospital in Strasbourg, also prescribed a mixture of wax and turpentine in his Fieldbook of Wound Medicine, published in 1537. At Isenheim, a surviving employment contract for a wound surgeon hired in 1708 stipulates that he manufacture the Saint Anthony salve by collecting and preparing local herbs. A large Crucifixion scene that formally balances balm, wine, and blood suggests that the monks of Isenheim, who were well versed in botanical remedies for dermatological illnesses, were fully aware of the spiritual-allegorical value ascribed to essential tree resins.

The symbolic and practical pertinence of resins in their hardened state is also the subtext for Grünewald’s Lamentation in the predella of the altarpiece, in which Christ’s loyal retinue mourns over his lifeless body after it has been deposited from the Cross (Fig. 2). Befitting a section of the altarpiece that Germans call its coffin (Sarg), Grünewald’s painting of the recumbent Christ continues the Passion narrative and, situated below the gummy blood of the Crucifixion trickling downward, exemplifies another principal use of tree exudates: to retard and mask the odor of putrefaction. Purged of any foreign bodies that had ravaged his skin, which has greened further since the Crucifixion, Christ displays in his open gashes the dark-cerise blood in sculpted paint, whose coagulation the various versions of the Spiritual Woods compared to the specific thickening tendency of resin and pitch (Fig. 16). The brittling tendency that Brunschwig describes as resin’s ideal property to generate a second skin, or incarnative, is here manifested in the scabbing of the dark red paint on Christ’s lesions. In Fridolin’s prayer for the twenty-second day of May, the curative analog to one’s hardened heart at the sight of Christ’s suffering was the hardened resin ("harzt / verharzt"), which was used to embalm the wounds of Christ, the King ("des gesalbten kunigs"). The coagulation of Christ’s blood in the Lamentation can thus be understood as a kind of self-embalmment, for Christ’s incorruptible body, unsusceptible to decay, was prepared for burial—allied, indeed, before the Sabbath began at sunset—as a matter of Jewish tradition (John 19:38–42).

Indeed, embalming was reserved for the special few in the Middle Ages. In addition to the evisceration of body organs, “to embalm” involved smearing balsams and waxes saturated with aromatic spices and oils inside the internal cavity. To take the handling of the antipope Alexander V’s corpse (d. 1410) as an example of what had become standard embalming practice, the anatomist Pietro d’Argellata first removed Alexander’s entrails, washed out the hollow interior with ethanol, and filled it with cotton and a powder, which comprised numerous spices, among them tree resins like dragon tree blood (Drachenblut Harz). In fact, turpentine had been recommended for generations by surgeons like de Mondeville as an important
means of hampering decomposition.\textsuperscript{96} For the vast majority of patients who never walked out of Isenheim’s hospital church, then, Christ’s cadaver served as an exemplar for the postmortem redemptive power of the Crucifixion’s liquid output. The smearing of plant saps was the ultimate assurance that one’s mortal remains were properly tended to before burial, at once a practical solution to bodily decay and anointment with the botanical blood symbolically flowing from Christ’s wounds.

According to custom, wax, turpentine, and pitch would also infuse the cerecloth linens, which were sutured together and wrapped around the corpse as the last step of embalment before burial.\textsuperscript{97} The burial cloth with which Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea bound Christ’s cadaver was also mixed with myrrh and aloes (John 19:40). The Isenheim \textit{Lamentation} is consistent with all of these practices. Crowded around Christ on the right, Nicodemus and the two Marys have prepared him for the empty stone tomb pictured before a dreary landscape on the predella’s left side (Fig. 2). He is held up for display on a long, unsoiled burial shroud that spans the length of his entire oversize body; his mangled, desiccated remains, now rid of splintered branches, would have been preserved and repaired with the very balsams whose potency his death on the Cross promised. While this \textit{Lamentation} serves as a veiled symbol of the Eucharistic bread atop the altar cloth, Christ in his lifelessness also provides a model of the ideal burial as it was conducted at the time: with bodies rubbed and blanketed in tree juices.\textsuperscript{98}

MARY’S WOMB AS FERTILE GROUND

The cerecloth reappears when the altarpiece’s shutters open to episodes in the life of Christ that rejoice in the wholeness of his body. Following his Incarnation at the Annunciation and birth in the Nativity, Christ’s Resurrection vividly reestablishes the integrity of his form subsequent to its fragmentation and mutilation at the Crucifixion (Fig. 17). Although his figure is physically circumscribed, the ethereal Christ has transcended his battered skin, which, as the predella’s still-visible \textit{Lamentation} reminds us, had been smeared with resins and wrapped in a fragrant cerecloth. His ravaged body having been properly embalmed, the risen, levitating Christ basks in the starry heavens. A brilliance radiating from within blinds any surface contours of his flesh, leaving prominent marks, like his facial features and wounds, to merge with the flat golden ground. Swaddled in the now prismatically lambent shroud, so enlarged that it coils around itself, draping over the tomb and billowing freely in the air, Christ’s unblemished skin in the afterlife offered a poignant postmortem inspiration to those at Isenheim treating and afflicted with dermatological disorders. A severed tree trunk pointing toward the resurrected Christ from the bottom of the composition also reminds the viewer of the symbolic and physical source enabling his extraterrestrial transformation.

To the left of the Resurrection, a different fragmentary tree peeks from behind a curtain hanging in the middle of the primary composition from this view of the altarpiece, which brings the Spiritual Woods topos into still greater expression (Fig. 19). Its trunk bulged toward the infant Christ and his mother, the fig fittingly occupies the privileged position of the now obscured tree-cross that it typologically prefigures.\textsuperscript{99} The healthy, leafy tree extends its branches across a cruciform gate, further accentuating the charged nature of the altarpiece’s central axis but also reverberating beyond and outward to the enclosed garden (\textit{Hortus conclusus}) that stands for Mary’s virginity.\textsuperscript{100} Just as they had for Christ’s death on the
Cross, spiritual writers at the time indulged in horticultural metaphors for his Incarnation. According to Fridolin, the “noble wood of Christ” could come to fruition only insofar as he was planted in the fertile field of Mary’s womb. Mary was the garden, “the flower of the field,” to the Christological tree. She was considered a healing mediatrix (Heilsvermittlerin) owing to her associations with the healing powers of herbs. During the so-called Virgin Thirty (die Frauendreißiger), or the approximately thirty days between Mary’s Assumption and Birth (August 15 to September 8), it was believed that wild and planted herbs matured into their most potent medicinal form—and were therefore ripe for plucking.

But Mary’s relation to medicinal plants is structural. As the allegory’s terra firma (Erdreich), the Virgin’s fertile body participates in and facilitates the sprouting of the divine tree from which all created greenery radiates. As Fridolin exploited the ambiguity between Christ as the quince (Kute) and the rod (Rute) in vernacular German, small devotional woodcuts of the Virgin as a trunk (virga in Latin) transpose the arboreal metaphors associated with her immaculate stock and her scion (Fig. 18). Christ is nailed to the very offshoots of the spiritualized flower stemming from the hearts of his forebears, who are seated on the turf benches of the enclosed garden in the foreground. Witnessed by his angels, God’s cosmogonic plan comes into full bloom with Christ’s Crucifixion on the living wood implanted with sacred roots. Although writing decades before Grünewald’s commission, Fridolin’s horticultural adaptation of the Incarnation almost doubles as an ekphrastic description of the artist’s Virgin and Child and Annunciation panels:

On the fourth day [of May], behold the noble Incarnation and Birth of Jesus. Bid the angelic company of knights…in the holy heavenly army to lead you to the beautiful green meadows into Bethlehem, where therein after the long, cold and gloomy winter…the highest creator plowed the Holy Ghost into the arable earth of the virginal body of Mary through the Annunciation of the angel Saint Gabriel, dugged with a multitude of graces, and moistened with the sweet May dew and long rain, and fertilized with noble seed of the eternally godly, eternally paternal Word, and made pregnant of the son of God. There, over all arose and sprang forth so many blessed little green grasses and fragrant little herbs…

In Grünewald’s panel of the Virgin and Child (Fig. 19), above a tiny ecclesiastical cityscape perched before green hills and soaring mountains, a flurry of golden angels cascades through the parting rain clouds to herald the holy pair in the grassy rose garden bathed in springtime light.

Grünewald, however, does not depict a Nativity. Marked by the golden crown being carried down to earth from God the Father in heaven, the coronation of the Virgin instead represents the mystical marriage between Christ and his mother, the Sponsa Christi. Following a long tradition of expressing love of God with the erotic language of the Song of Songs, Grünewald engaged with the same horticultural variety of Solomonic bridal mysticism that functioned as the subtext for all of the Spiritual Woods exegeses. In line with the curving fig tree and the cruciform garden gate, the wooden hospital bed on which the Virgin sits doubles as the flowering nuptial bed from Song of Songs 1:15. The Dominican preacher Johannes Kreutzer, known for his ambitious but unfinished exposition on the Song of Songs,
cites the same verse in his edition of the *Geistlicher Mai* from the mid-fifteenth century. In it, he bids his Observant nuns to sleep on the soft and tender bed bedecked in flowers to achieve mystical union with their bridegroom. Fridolin, in contrast, more explicitly compares the hospital bed to Christ’s Cross.

That Grünewald painted a close replica of his Isenheim Virgin and Child for the canon Heinrich Reitzmann of the collegiate church of Saints Peter and Alexander in Aschaffenburg in 1516, both of which center on the infant clutching the rosary, speaks to the popular reception of the garden allegories that were originally targeted for cloistered nuns. Unlike the Aschaffenburg Madonna, though, the Isenheim panel is joined together with a concert of angels performing under an ornate baldachin (Fig. 19). Because it resists conventional iconographic classification, Ruth Mellinkoff has characterized the picture as “one of the great interpretive puzzles for critics and historians of art.” However, the image as a whole is perfectly consistent with the Spiritual Woods metaphors, which identify the healing powers of the wood of the cross throughout Solomon’s Old Testament verses.

It has been well established that the left half of the composition visually prefigures what transpires on the right. The red-curtained baldachin with its sculpted prophets alludes to the Temple of the Old Law that gives way to the personified Ecclesia witnessing the Infant Christ with Mary in the New. But here the typologies between the Old and New Testament that pertain to the healing properties of the Spiritual Woods are what would have resonated with the Antonine monks and their patients. Although embellished with the kinds of organic
motifs that were becoming fashionable in southern German church architecture about 1500, the structure rather harks back to the built environment laid out in Kreutzer’s version of the *Geistlicher Mai*. Carved not in inert stone but bright and lively earthen matter, it resembles the “beautiful and resplendent palace” of cedar and cypress—an allusion to Song of Songs 1:16 and two of the four arboreal species comprising Christ’s Cross—built for Kreutzer’s nuns in their spiritual garden. Extrapolated from the Solomonic bedchamber, wine cellar, banquet house, and storeroom, Kreutzer’s mystical wooden edifice shelters the soul and functions quite like a medieval monastary. It housed “a pantry, herb garden, and pharmacy,” which contained more than fifty specific “spices, potions, ointments, aromatics, oils, and confections” for the use of nuns in their medical practices.

In a subsequent chapter, Kreutzer’s nuns are aurally nourished by the sweet, reverberating sounds of string music (*Saitenspiel*), whose therapeutic effects he attributes to the instrument’s functional likeness to Christ’s body strung about the wooden Cross.

The harp signifies Jesus the *sponsus*, who was nailed and stretched on the wood of the cross. The wood [of the harp] represents the cross, the pins [Nagel] the weapons, with which he was crucified. The strings are his holy appendages and veins pulled apart and made taut over the cross. The music and the harp player [are] the devout soul.

Drawing their golden bows in the open air and beneath the leafy Solomonic canopy, the Isenheim angels thus serenade the holy pair with the sweet melodies of the wood of the cross. In a pen-and-ink drawing from a manuscript copy of Fridolin’s *Der geistliche Mai*, which belonged to a nun of the Franciscan convent in Pütrich, we are reminded that the healing capacity of string instrumentation is rooted in spiritualized nature (Fig. 20). Resounding from the earth, the music generated by the Infant Christ fingering a harp from a depression in the ground stimulates the sprouting of nature and its attendant medicinal fruits. The image’s caption reads, “I, Jesus, want to play the harp well and sweetly for you, that you might fend off fever.”

Moreover, the large wooden bathtub in the foreground of Isenheim’s Marian picture also belongs to the standard repertoire of springtime rituals that Fridolin and Kreutzer allegorized (Fig. 19). Stretching across the two central panels, the tub formally and programmatical ly participates in the same horticultural matrix of Holy Cross mysticism foretold by the monumental exuding Crucifixion from the altarpiece’s closed state. With the herbs grown in the fecund ground of the Virgin’s womb and fortified by the fluids from Christ’s body drained on the tree-cross, Fridolin and Kreutzer beseech their readers to draw a hot medicinal bath to “entirely sweat out from themselves their wicked desires, corporeal lusts, and evil yearnings.” Introducing Fridolin’s chapter on the subject in the Pütrich manuscript, a drawing shows Christ in the mystical wooden tub, which, with its two protruding handles, appears strikingly similar to that found in the Isenheim composition (Fig. 21). Accompanied by an angel, the Infant Christ eats from a lateral plank, carries a ladle, and is about to drink from a *Krautstrunk* beaker with its distinctive decorative prunts—all conforming to contemporary accounts of bathing. Though neglected by historians, the spiritualized May Bath proved so provocative at the time that it spawned an entire subgenre of devotional allegories by the same name, whose audience expanded to include male monastics and the literate public. During the years Grünewald painted his panels for Isenheim, Thomas Murner published his illustrated text *A Devout, Spiritual Bathing Tour* (1514) in the nearby Alsatian city of Strasbourg. While he reversed the roles of the actors from those in the Spiritual Woods texts, Murner nevertheless staged bathing therapy—this time with Christ as the bathing master and Murner as patient—as an allegory for repentance.
Apart from figuring as subjects of the devotional prayers, though, daily activities like tending the herb garden, stocking the apothecary, composing music, and even bathing constituted typical monastic obligations. While the pastiche of healing imagery from the Spiritual Woods would have appealed to sick patients receiving variations of these treatments, its privileged placement on the Isenheim Chapter’s high altar—and its visibility restricted to special feast days when the first set of wings was opened—indicates that the Antonine monks considered these medical duties an integral part of the spiritual exercises that elevated them closer to God.

SAINT ANTHONY’S ABUNDANCE
The critical earthly element that supports the spiritual growth outlined in the horticultural allegories is water. In the mystical garden picture he produced for canon Heinrich Reitzmann of Aschaffenburg, Grünewald painted Mary not on a hospital bed but perched on the edge of an empty cistern. Their source of moisture dried up, the plants are nourished instead from Mary and Christ’s dominating presence as personified fountains; a double rainbow appears in the illuminated mist above their bodies. Intimately familiar with the mechanics of irrigation, Grünewald reserved the aspects of the Spiritual Woods allegories relating to hydration and watering for the Isenheim Altarpiece’s final opening, which was revealed on the most momentous of holy days. In its most sublime view, the altarpiece dedicates itself to the Antonine Order’s patron saint as well as two of the chapter’s preceptors, Jean d’Orliac and Guido Guersi, who commissioned the sculpted shrine by 1490 and its painted shutters by 1512 (Fig. 4).

In the left panel of Anthony meeting Paul the Hermit, Grünewald portrays the two saints seated amid teeming flora and fauna in a Theban oasis. A date palm fans its fronds above Paul and a gnarly tree covered in stringy moss and lichen is rooted behind Anthony. Scholars interested in the altarpiece’s service to the adjacent infirmary have focused their attention on the three species of plants sprouting below Anthony as those recommended in contemporary herbals for the treatment of Saint Anthony’s fire. But those and the other herbs in the painting’s foreground sustain life only by means of the wellspring beneath Paul that inundates the soil with water (Fig. 22). A crudely chopped tree branch with decayed heartwood directs the flow into a makeshift basin made up of haphazardly raised stone slabs. Its humble construction
mirroring that of Grünewald’s reflections on the wood of the cross, the wooden plumbing, in fact, constitutes yet another representation of the exuding wood of the cross—this time channeling its creative potential to the mystical herb garden. In his passage on the five lovely flowing fountains, Kreutzer calls the fourth “the little Jesus fountain, named after our savior and redeemer, the holiest of mankind. And the fountain . . . springs forth from the trunk [Stock] of the cross; and it possesses five large pipes, which carry out the red juice” mixed with the water and sweat of Christ.” The two saints, Paul and Anthony, positioned above the fertile, soaked earth thus figure as spiritual surrogates for the healing powers emanating from Christ on the Cross. Such is the conceit for a drawing from Fridolin’s Spiritual Woods, in which a haloed saint pours medicine (Arznei) from a vessel into a nun’s sack (Fig. 23). Perhaps a portrait of the manuscript’s owner, Eufrosina, the picture illustrates an encounter between heaven and earth—the saint symbolized by the gold ground and the nun by the green grass and blue sky—that dignifies Eufrosina’s worldly duties as “gardener” and healer for her convent.
If Anthony and Paul represent the vitality of greenery, then the opposite panel of Anthony’s Temptation shows its destruction. Demons incinerate a timber structure in the background while hybrid monsters beat Anthony with branchlike clubs. The anthropomorphic demon in the foreground of Anthony’s Temptation, with its gangrened skin covered in boils and its limbs partially deformed, exhibits symptoms of Saint Anthony’s fire. Fastened to a cracked and fungus-covered tree trunk (which corresponds to the sawed-down version in the Resurrection panel), a piece of paper recounts Anthony’s struggle according to the Golden Legend. “Where were you good Jesus, where were you? Why were you not there to heal my wounds?”

Anthony’s ability to cure, though, is offset by his control over who falls ill in the first place—hence, his ubiquitous representation as an enthroned judge. Following a juridical iconography commonly found on seals, the Isenheim variation seems to underscore the order’s heritage in herbal healing. Just as Grünewald paints Anthony’s modest throne as branches tethered together over a stone seat, beneath which the holy plants grow, the carved throne of the frontal Anthony in the altarpiece’s shrine appears arboreal in constitution, springing off foliated spirals on its four corners (Fig. 4).

Attributed to the Strasbourg artist Nikolaus Hagenauer between 1490 and 1493, the shrine is one of the earliest instances of the kind of sculpted wooden cabinets that were beginning to furnish countless altar mensas across southern Germany. Hagenauer’s work stands literally and historiographically in the shadow of Grünewald’s, receiving only a tiny fraction of the popular and scholarly attention paid to the altarpiece, but the arboreal Christological metaphors extend to it as well. Wilhelm Vöge in 1917 was among the first to appreciate the shrine’s uniquely flat and enormous wall of leaves, which covers more than one-third of the middle compartment and hangs over the figure of Saint Anthony. Others have since noted the mixture of arboreal and viticultural attributes therein—tiny buds and acorns alongside pronounced grape bunches (Fig. 25). Not only signifying the Eucharistic wine, fructuating vines also stood for Christ on the Cross (Fig. 25). For example, the Christ child drawn in the Fridolin manuscript from Munich steadies himself on a fork-shaped staff that resembles the alder poles carrying the weight of the vines framing him; his body becomes the vine, as his tufts of hair intimate the juicy grape clusters. Viticultural mirrors for the wood of the cross on Isenheim’s carved shrine would have underscored the healing potential of its Saint-Vinage.
a wine-vinegar medicament that the Isenheim monks infused with herbs and in which they immersed the relics of Saint Anthony.\textsuperscript{140}

Moreover, the finely wrought branches and tendrils of Hagenauer’s canopy, swarming with sopping, writhing leaves, call attention to the very wooden medium in which they were carved. They therefore possess more than an iconic kinship with their referent. They were and are trees—the materiae medicae that were integral to therapeutic practice at Isenheim precisely for their tangible and elemental composition: their sap, balsam, and other exudates, which Antonine monks emulsified and fermented for various therapies. Conspicuously crowning Anthony and his peers, the ornamental screen of foliage, among the first of its kind and which inspired many imitators, thus operates on a polyvalent register to signify and participate in the physio-spiritual healing that was manifested in the miraculous works of the order’s founder. As such, the shrine’s earthly flora is stylized to suit its sacred setting. Sheathed in a burnished gold, the branches and leaves conform to the constraints of the cabinet’s architecture and envelop the four symbols of the Evangelists in the central screen.

Indeed, Hagenauer’s sculpted vegetation in wood attests to the broader ethos of herbal books: that the salutary quality of plants is inherent in their organic essence, their pulp and lifeblood. The wooden substrate thus shares material properties with the mélange of natural designs into which it is hewn: branches, vines, and grape bunches—all of which were central to the physical healing of the sick at Isenheim’s infirmary.

The efficacy of material medicine, however, is predicated theologically, and at Isenheim foreshadowed programmatically, by Christ’s suffering on the Spiritual Wood, the Ur-plant grown from the Virgin’s womb, from whose images all creative greenery emanated. It is therefore difficult to believe that one of the largest and most expressive of such images painted in northern Europe would not have participated in the same dialogue of spiritual and physical healing as the tiny plants sprouting in the corner of one of the altarpiece’s numerous panels. Tree resins and plant juices were of paramount importance for treating the sick at Isenheim and throughout Europe. Consistent with devotional tracts that reveled in the figurative elisions of a bleeding Lord on the exuding tree of the cross, Grünewald’s painted branchy Corpus Christi is drained of its essential effluvia by gigantic wooden beams, which are shown to secrete fluids when struck. Grünewald’s sensitivity to the sacred materiality of wood in all of its forms reached a crescendo in his portrayal of its acoustic blessings. Produced from the agitation of the strands wound tightly around the instruments’ wooden frames, the dulcet tones of the angels’ choir shower the Virgin and Child in the garden with a vibratory energy that proleptically calls to mind the redemptive howling of Christ on the Cross.

Still, Grünewald and Hagenauer’s grandiose representational strategies were no match for the tiny traces of the wood of Christ’s Cross (“de ligno sanctae crucis”) and Saint Anthony’s head, which were housed in a silver T-shaped reliquary that likely crowned the altarpiece’s superstructure.\textsuperscript{141} Pushing the limit of metaphor to enliven its professed power for their viewers, the two artists ultimately could only approximate the divinity of the singular exuding heavenly Maien.

Maien, the medieval German word introduced here, also took on an intransitive verbal form to evoke the ceremonial basking in the seasonal reawakening of nature. Fridolin invoked the rhetorical device in the final sentences of the prayer concluding the third week of spiritual exercises for his Clarissant nuns.\textsuperscript{142} “Thus delight yourself [Allso ermay dych] in the sweet-smelling flowers in this third week of prayer… Take a stroll to the wood of the saintly Cross.”\textsuperscript{143} Like the occasions that outdoor rituals were marked to honor, then, the texts and images related to the Spiritual Woods speak to humanity’s broader entanglement with God’s creation.\textsuperscript{144} In fact, the manuscript copy of Fridolin’s Der geistliche Mai discussed above was
handwritten and illustrated for the gardener of the Pütrich convent, Sister Eufrosina, whose use of the text must have blurred the lines between horticultural, ritual, and religious praxis. For the Antonine monks at Isenheim, then, the act of tending their garden and mixing the herbs, resins, and juices for their salve and wine would have constituted both spiritual and medicinal practice.44

Having incorporated them into art historical inquiry for the first time, I wish to conclude by restating how the Spiritual Woods allegories pose fascinating new avenues for late medieval and Reformation studies more broadly. In their blurring of the processes of plant domestication and Christ’s manner of sacrifice, they reach their semantic climax and reflect new terms for the expression of corporeal violence in word and image. A late medieval coda to physical degradation and suffering as catalysts for spectator compassion and empathy, horticultural devotional tropes of Christ writhing on the tree-cross or the Virgin as an arable field elicited from their audiences a more literal image of spiritual cultivation: the draining and squeezing out of Christ’s (and the saints’) vital liquids for sacramental but also medicinal and other extraliturgical gain. That is, to fixate on the piety of guilt, compassion, and self-abnegation in the spiritual license for the embrace of greenery and its refinement for material benefit.

But it also became a target of early Reformers, who were vehemently opposed to rituals, artistic representations, prayers, and other religious gestures that displaced veneration of the Word toward nature. Printed in Strasbourg in the same year that Grünewald was painting his panels, a woodcut from Geiler von Kaysersberg’s On the 12 Merits of the Tree of the Crucifix parodies popular conceptions of Christ crucified on the Geistliche Maien (Fig. 6). Here, peasants yank at the two branchlike crossbars of Christ’s tree-cross, which yield a fantastic mishmash of fruits. An aristocratic woman baring her shoulders plucks a grape as she flirtatiously exchanges gazes with the viewer. Distracted by the urge to reap his bounty, the people fail to even notice the crestfallen Christ hanging at the center, who stares downward and elicits sympathy only from the angels below him. Unlike the depicted laity, the reader of Geiler’s early Reformational text can draw enlightenment from nature, having meditated on the abstracted form that Christ’s branches approximate and the timeless symbol of God’s love for his created world despite its insatiable inhabitants: a heart.

GREGORY C. BRYDA is assistant professor in the Department of Art History at Barnard College, Columbia University [Art History Department, 3009 Broadway, 500 Diana Center, New York, NY 10027, gbryda@barnard.edu].
NOTES
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4. As recorded by the Greek bishop Athanasius, Anthony regularly attributed his miraculous acts to the image and the Letter to Marcellinus (Cologne: Böhlau, 1976), 27ff.
6. Th ese three texts in this genre will be cited throughout this study. Th e fi rst is the anonymously written Geistlicher Maibaum, which was composed at the end of the fi fteenth century in southern Germany. Six handwritten copies survive in libraries in Berlin, Beuron, Freiburg, and Munich. It also survives in print in Geistlicher Auslegung des Lebens Jesu Christi (Ulm: Johann Zainer der Ältere, ca. 1482); and Anton Birlinger transcribed the passage from Staatsbibliothek, Berlin (hereafter SBB), mgq 1112 (ca. 1500, written in Bavarian) in “Askerische Traktate aus Augsburg IV,” Alemannia 8 (1880): 103–17. Th e second major text of this study is Johannes Kreutzer’s Geistlicher Mai, which was written in Alsace in the mid-fi fteenth century and survives in three manuscripts in Stuttgart, Berlin, and Moscow; I cite Moscow State Library, Funds 68, inv. no. 446 (1477), Alemmannic language, as transcribed in Natalija Janina, “Bräute Christi,” Legenden und Traktate aus dem Straßburger Magdalenenkloster (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 217–74. Th e third is Stephan Fridolin’s Der geistliche Mai, written in the mid-1480s or mid-1490s and found in three extant manuscripts in Augsburg, Berlin, and Munich; I cite Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich (hereafter SBB), Cgm 4473 (1129), which is written in Middle Bavarian (mittelhochdeutsch) and has never been transcribed. I am greatly indebted to the ever-generous Hanns Hubach for editing my transcriptions of Fridolin’s Der geistliche Mai that appear here. On the Munich manuscript, see Karl Schneider, Die deutschen Handschriften der Bayerischen Staatsbibliothek München: Die mittelalterlichen Handschriften aus Cgm 4002–5247 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1960), 130–32.
8. Th e Art Bulletin June 2018
12. Th e Art Bulletin June 2018
13. Variants of “fl owing forth” or “fl owing over,” which appear throughout all three texts examined here, constitute part of the standard Neoplatonic mystical grammar of emanation (enteinai/entouf) exhibited in the works of Meister Eckhart, Suos, and other German Dominicans. Bernard McGinn offers an overview of Eckhart’s and Suos’s concept of “divine outfl ow” in Th e Harvest of Mysticism in Medieval Germany (1300–1500) (New York: Crossroad, 2005), 94–239.

16. Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm, *Maec.*, *in Deutscher Wörterbuch* (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1984), 12: col. 1473–76. The popularity of Fridolin’s *Der geistige Mai* persisted during the Counter-Reformation; it was printed in Landshut in 1533, Munich in 1549 and 1550, and Dillingen in 1581.

17. For the authoritative biography of Grünewald, see Hanns Hubach, “Grünewald,” in *Allgemeines Künstlerlexikon* 63 (Munich: Saur, 2009), 386–96.

18. *Crucifixion* in the Kunstmuseum, Basel (1501); *Small Crucifixion* in the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC (1502); *Standing Man of Sorrows* from the Lindenhardt Altarpiece (1503; attributed to Grünewald); *Crucifixion from the Isenheim Altarpiece* (1512–15); *Lamentation of the Magdalene* (date unknown; survives from a copy by Christoph Kräfft, ca. 1648); *Study of the Crucifixion* in the Staatliche Kunsthalle, Karlsruhe (ca. 1510); Tauberbischofsheim Crucifixion in the Staatliche Kunsthalle, Karlsruhe (1523–25); *Saint John under the Cross* (reported by Joachim von Sandrart); *“I[tem] crucifix, Maria und Sant Johannes*” (1528, reported in Grünewald’s estate inventory).


20. Lottlina Behling writes that no painter—except perhaps Albrecht Düer—until Grünewald had reached such a “euphony of vegetal form of such compelling empathy as to the essence [Wesen] of plant phenomena, of such a profound connection between plant and man according to form and symbol.” Behling, *Die Pflanze in der mittelalterlichen Tafelmalerei* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1967), 140–49. For a similar symbolic analysis of Grünewald’s depiction of plants, see Wolfgang Kühn, “Grünewalds Isenheimer Altar als Darstellung mittelalterlicher Heilkräuter,” in *Kosmos: Handwörter für Naturfreunde* 12 (1948): 127–33.

21. A chapter of the Holy Cross was endowed in the church of Tauberbischofsheim, just south of Würzburg, in 1498. A priest named Virenkorn supplemented the endowment in 1504 and 1515. Because Virenkorn had a benefice in Aschaffenburg, where Grünewald had his workshop, it is assumed that he was in charge of commissioning the artist and that the altarpiece decorated a cross altar. That it was bilateral also contributes to this last point, as it would have been visible to spectators on either side of the cross aisle. Wältcher Karl Zülich, *Der Historische Grünewald: Mathis Goethardt-Neithardt* (Munich: Bruckmann, 1938), 261; and Jessica Mack-Andrick, “Von beiden Seiten betrachtet: Überlegungen zum Tauberbischofsheimer Altar,” in Mack-Andrick et al., *Grünewald und seine Zeit*, 68–77, 71–75.


23. The dermatological signs of Anthony’s fire, or ergotism, as it is now known, are only the outward manifestations of a disease that attacks the nervous and vascular systems, in turn leading to seizures, hallucinations, and gangrene. Behling, *Die Pflanze*, 145; and Kühn, “Grünewalds Isenheimer Altar,” 20–27.

24. Hayum, *The Isenheim Altarpiece*, 27 ff., has proposed that Christ’s body in both the *Crucifixion and Lamentation*, which split apart from its limbs with the opening of the altarpiece’s wings and predella, served as a model for amputee victims of Saint Anthony’s lute.


26. James Snyder, *Northern Renaissance Art: Painting, Sculpture, the Graphic Arts from 1550 to 1750* (New York: Abrams, 1985), 349: “A similar emaciated and deformed image of Christ on the cross is found in the so-called Plague Crucifixions, a type of Anachthildbild in sculpture such as the expressionistic Crucifix in the convent of Santa Maria im Kapitol Cologne that served as a mystical devotional piece.” See also Astrid Reuter, “Zur expressiven Bildsprache Grünewalds am Beispiel des Gekreuzigten,” in Mack-Andrick et al., *Grünewald and seine Zeit*, 78–86.


29. The Isenheim Altarpiece remained at the monastery until the monastery was dissolved during the French Revolution, at which point it was transferred to the local branch of the French national library in 1792 for safekeeping. In 1852, it was moved to the chapel of the former Theolicher Verlag, 2000), 353–408.


32. The inventory of Grünewald’s personal effects after his death in Halle in 1528 lists copies of Luther’s sermons, a New Testament, and other “Lutheran hogwash” (45). Item 27 predig Lutters ingebunden...58. Item das nu testament, ingebunden und sunst viel scharetene luterich”). Reiner Marquard, *Mathias Grünewald und die Reformation* (Berlin: Frank & Timme, 2009), 170–77. For a summary and persuasive criticism of Marquard’s argument, see Mack-Andrick, “Von beiden Seiten betrachtet,” 72–75; and Hubach, “Grünewald,” 392. In his final years, Grünewald separated from Cardinal Albrecht of Brandenburg just as the cardinal expelled Protestants from his court. Grünewald’s roommate in Halle was Hans Plock, a stalwart of Luther. Still, we cannot ascertain the extent of the Reformation’s influence on his work, much less his personal beliefs.

33. Early Reformers also exhibited a continued interest in the Passion; Luther himself updated the *Speculum passionis* and was involved in the conception of its illustrations. See Martin Luther, *Ein Betbüchlein mit Kalender und Passional*, Wittenberg, 1529, ed. Frieder Schulz (Kassel: J. Stauda, 1821).

34. Saint Bridget, *Revelations*, 4, quoted in Snyder, *Northern Renaissance Art*, 349; see also Zülich, *Der Historische Grünewald*, 146.


zwischen Kloster und Stadt: Passionsfrömmigkeit im ausgehenden Mittelalter. Der Carmen Stange have inferred 1485 or 1495 as poten-

40. By comparing the calendar with the days of the 1998), 91–122, esp. 103; Stange, "Stephan Fridolin:

41. The medicinal aspect of Fridolin’s text is woefully

42. Fridolin, Der geistliehe Mai, fols. 233r–v: “Das salve [salvaj; Salver] plät ist lang und rauch und hat vyl rüinge-

43. Geistlicher Maibaum, in Birlting, 109: “Dye mynglic-

boutte, à des marés de sang.” Huysmans’s writings on Grünewald in Lás-hau (1894) and Trois primitifs (1905) contributed significantly to the rediscovery and appre-

45. Immense extravaganzas of Christ’s torment on the Cross did not cease in the fourteenth century; indeed, sermons, prayer books, and plays continued in the same vein for generations thereafter. In his essay, which com-
piles Passion literature that is “reflected” in Grünewald’s Crucifixions, Dietmar Lüdke traces the reincarnation of many of the specific motifs promulgated by Bridget’s Revelations. Lüdke, “Die ‘Kreuzigung’ Grünewalds im Spiegel mittelalterlicher Passionsliteratur,” in Mack-Andrick et al., Grünewald und seine Zeit, 87–95.

46. Fridolin, Der geistliehe Mai, fol. 233v: “Item in dyssem

47. Ibid., fol. 233v: “So zaigt er dyr, wy mit den wercken

48. Ibid., fols. 236v–237v: “cor da benedicyta [Cendo benedicto], das gesunt ist für alle weetagen des haubes und störct vast das byrn.. Pey dyr kruat, das ein
groß kruat is und vyl spitzger strechter dorn hat in seinen pluemern und peterm, wūr iglych erinert der
donerkonkrist. . . . Item pestack das pad auch mit Pronelen (Prunella) kruat, das auch vast gesunt ist für das haubtwie und hat in seiner plume schone praeu
köblin. . . .” The Gart der Gesundheit, chap. lxxii, pre-

49. Mack-Andrick (“Von beiden Seiten betrachtet,” 72–74) has refuted the hypothesis that Grünewald’s unusual

50. The subject of the twenty-third day, the quince is one of several fruit trees that are featured in Fridolin’s third

51. Ibid., fol. 232v: “du stacht wol das dye küten stend nit auf hoohen paumen sundem demuertig un[d] achtpar nit stagen standen. . . .”

52. Fridolin compares the arma Christi to the fittings of a

53. From Henry Suso’s Life of the Servant (1462), in which he describes several exercises (Übungen) that he follows over the course of the liturgical year, we have an early

54. Henry Suso’s Vita, in Deutsche Schriften, ed. Karl Bühlmeyer (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1907), chap. 12, 32–33; and Pflüger, „Zur Geschichte der Marien-Maiandacht,” 166. So provocative was Suso’s mystical exercise of the Spiritual Woods that it spawned an entire subgenre of devotional allegories with the same title. For more on such texts in lyric form, see Theo, Die mystische Lyrik, 246–50, 460–61, 485, 500–501, 511. The late medieval spiritualization of the secular May Pole custom in word and image is discussed at length in Gregory C. Brayda, “Tree, Vine, and Herb: Vegetal Themes and Media in Late Gothic Germany” (PhD diss., Yale University, 2016).

55. Geistlicher Maibaum, in Birlting, “Asketische Traktate aus Augsburg IV,” 113: “Das harte wefften auf das cretze, das er so hert gestrech ward über das rauche des unge-


57. In his essay, which com-
piles Passion literature that is “reflected” in Grünewald’s Crucifixions, Dietmar Lüdke traces the reincarnation of many of the specific motifs promulgated by Bridget’s Revelations. Lüdke, “Die ‘Kreuzigung’ Grünewalds im Spiegel mittelalterlicher Passionsliteratur,” in Mack-Andrick et al., Grünewald und seine Zeit, 87–95.

58. Fridolin, Der geistliehe Mai, fol. 233v: “Item in dyssem

59. Geistlicher Maibaum, in Birlting, “Asketische Traktate aus Augsburg IV,” 113: “Das harte wefften auf das cretze, das er so hert gestrech ward über das rauche des unge-

60. The Art Bulletin June 2018
54. Ibid., fols. 183v–184r: “Da hat man erst schmächt den saft und kraft dyser gesunden kräftigen kuren, aus der dye heylligen apostel, evangelisten und lerrer guet, kōstlich und kräftig larwegen gemacht.” Fridolin’s readers should emulate the holy apostles, evangelists, and church fathers in their spreading of the honey-infused word of God.

55. The Gart der Geundheit, chapter c, indicates that pharmacists prescribe the quince fruit (kudden haun) for a variety of oral and respiratory health problems; it also specifically calls for quince oculaires (lustwegen); “Dies kratz nüçzet man in der erczey. Der saft von kütten ist fast glüt asmaticas / das sind die einen kuncen atem haben…. Item in allen kränckyten mag man nützen dyve frucht und je latwegen wagen sy bringend dem herzten grosse kraft…” According to Konrad von Megenberg, the quince cures cough; see an Alsatian manuscript copy of his Buch der Natur now in Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg, Cod. Pal. germ. 100 (produced in Haguenau, 1444–48), bk. 4, chap. 13, 2439r–2449r.

56. Ibid., fols. 183v–184r: “Item die farb der kütten an ir selbs ist pläsch und gelb. Darpey pertacth die ellent gestalt all ofs allerlystern herm, wye sych der angespitzt und ergilbt hat, wye seine luecht [lichten] augen so tief in seinem heylligen haut gebunden sind,…. sein rosen roter mund erweyst, sein myniglyckhe angesicht erplacht und aller sain heylliger junckefruchlych fron ley ergilbe und erlaßt mit tiod farb.”

57. The monk Sibert der Gomboux writing in Lotharingia in 1089 described the sickness in his Hortus sanitatis (Mainz: Jakob Meydenbach, 1491), bk. 5, chap. ci.

58. Fridolin, Der geistliche Mai auf fol. 235r: “wunden seinen kuniglyckhen haubt, die pech des haysen pluets sindt geflossen über sein heyllige styrn, über sein heyllige kyndigklychen haubts, die pech des haysen pluets sindt ergilbt hat, wye seine luecht [lichten] augen.” Fridolin’s readers should consult the Grimms’ dictionary. It can be used transitively to designate the smearing of something with mineral or pine resin or intransitively to describe something that hardens with time, as pitch does. The author of the Geistlicher Maibaum employs the word intransitively—hence the irregular past participle form “gepichen.” Grimm and Grimm, “Pichen,” in Deutsches Wörterbuch, 1520col. 1837.


64. Signs of the branchy scourge also punctuate the Corps Christi in his Tauberbischofsheim Altarpiece and in his small Crucifixion now in the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.


67. For the most part, though, the depicted trees of the Livre des simples médecines are European conifers rather than deciduous tertiärnches because, as has been mentioned, Europeans used the eastern Mediterranean term “turpen-tine resin” to refer to the exuding species that were indigenous to their continent.

68. Zülich, Der Historische Grünewald, 146.


73. Michel Menu et al., “Analyse de la palette des couleurs du Retable d’Issenheim par Matthias Grünewald,” in La technique picturale de Grünewald et de ses contemporains: Colloque international des 24. 25. et 26 janvier 2006, ed. Pantxiu Bégurier-De Parpe (Colmar: Musée d’Unterlin-den, 2006), 49–60. While a targeted “destructive” study of Grünewald’s painting medium and lacquer has not been conducted, technical analysis attests to the widespread employment of turpentine in the mixing of pigments in...
the early modern period. The fugitive volatile oil of turpentine (paint thinner), however, leaves no trace evidence in the paint film; its presence is undetectable to scientists. Billinge et al., “Methods and Materials,” 41–42. That said, the circumstantial evidence points to its use as early as the fourteenth century. For the best summary on this topic, see Phenix, Some Instances in the History of Distilled Oil of Turpentine.

78. At this time, a rivalry over the true site of the Magdalene’s remains broke out between the town of Saint-Maximin, near the Sainte-Baume grotto, and the town of 78. B-22,2. translation from an extant copy printed by Anton Koberg

79. All quotations from the “Balsam of Marseille” are my translation. For the best summary on this topic, see various versions, which include turpentine. “It can be distin-


81. In its record for the balsam tree, the Book of Simple Medicines instructs its readers on how to identify synthetic versions, which include turpentine. “It can be distin-


83. Historians have noted that tree and shrub exudations like turpentine and conifer resins but also cassia, frank-

84. Trained in Paris, Montpellier, and then in Italy, Henri de Mondeville (ca. 1260–1316) compiled his Latin treatise on surgery at a time of internecine confl ict among physi-

85. Hieronymus Brunschwig’s surgical text was translated into English within thirty years of its original publication. Brunschwig, The Noble Experience of the Vertuous Handy Wreks of Surgery (London: Peter Treveris, 1513).


87. Inventories for hospital pharmacies and apothecaries as well as the guild statutes that stipulated their mini-

88. Hans von Gerdsdorf, Feldbuch der Wandertante (Strasbourg, 1517), v on the amputations he carried out in the Antonine hospital in Strasbourg, xxv, for his recipe on skin plasters, “ein güt wund pflezen sii de wunden unfiir die stich...vn al an thun dorin das wach vn de terpentin.”

89. Clémentz, Vom Balsam der Antoninier, 14 (cited from Archives Départementales du Haut-Rhin, Colmar, Isehnen 23): “Der Wandurtz soll die Sankt Antoniusalbe, wenn man sie benötigt, nach dem Hausezept herstellen; die Kräuter dazu hat er zu sammeln und zu bereiten, die anderen Ingredienzen sollten ihm geliefert werden.”

90. Phenix, Some Instances in the History of Distilled Oil of Turpentine, 14.


92. When both wax and tree resin are used in equal mea-

93. Fridolin, Der geistliche Mai, fols. 179v–181r.


97. Hawlik-van de Weter, “Die Methoden des Einbalsam-


101. Fridolin, Der geistliche Mai, fols. 87v–ct: “so fueren sy dich zu dem hyermelschen vatter, der ist der recht wal[n]r paumayster, der den edlen meyen Jesum Christi, den ainigen son seines heeren gepflanzt hat auf das weyt feldt, das wyr vilben al mugen prochen, wan wyr sein pegnern, da er vil[n] gesant hat, in dysse jamertal, das vol dysel und dorn ist, sych an dissen edlen mayen, wie er sych selber rуетet, so er sprycht. Ich pin ain pluem des veldes … an das furcht-

34 The Art Bulletin June 2018
geplant hat.” To license his horticultural exegesis—and underscore Mary’s virginity—he cites Song of Songs 2:1–2:
“I am the flower of the field, and the lily of the valleys. As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters.”


103. The celebration of their annual blessing on Assumption Day—known as the Kräuterweihe or Würzmesse—is stipulated in the thirteenth-century law book known as the Sachsenspiegel and must have been a brilliant and fragrant spectacle in churches across Germany. The chief sources for the study of the Kräuterweihe can be found in Adolf Franz’s monumental Die Kirchlichen Benediktionen im Mittelalter, vol. 1 (Freiburg: Herder, 1909), esp. 398; Michael Haberlandt, “Der Frauen-Dreißiger,” (Freiburg: Herder, 1909), vol. 2, 70–87; and idem, Nuns as Artists. See also Redpath and Busch, The Song of Songs in Western Medieval Christianity (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), esp. 151–77; Denys Turner, Eros and Allegory: Medieval Exegesis of the Song of Songs (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1995); and Ann Astell, The Song of Songs in the Middle Ages (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990).

104. Fridolin often refers to Mary’s virgin body as fertile ground or “guetigen ertrych.” See fols. 69v–70r: “Sych dyse edele benigna rossen an die jechling uber handt und eine Geistliche Ernte.” See also Landmann, “Johannes Kreutzer: Die Unterweisung,” 40.

105. Hamburger, Nuns as Artists, 21–24. The Spiritual Woods texts are not concerned with genealogical diagrams like the Tree of Jesse, which, for example, Fridolin, Der geistliche Mai, fols. 8v, 62v, mentions only twice in his treatise.


111. Kreutzer, Geistlicher Mai, fol. 166r; and Ganina, “Bräute Christi,” 258–59: “Der fünffte wollust in diesem garten und geistlichen meyen ist ein schöner zierlicher palast. . . . Dies huf mit sächlichem stärke gebetet gezymeret sie. . . . Die bühnen sind cypressen.” Probably based on the trees Isaiah lists that will “make the place of my feet glorious” (Isa. 60:15), Jacobus de Voragine, Golden Legend, “The Finding of the Holy Cross,” 12:78, reports that the Holy Cross was composed of four manner of trees: the palm, cypress, cedar, and olive. That said, in their extended vegetal mir ror metaphors of the Cross, neither Kreutzer nor Fridolin limited himself to these four arboreal species.


115. For translation of “Nagel” as the pin of a string instrument, see “Nagel,” in Grimm and Grimm, Deutsches Wörterbuch, 15:262, sec. Ivv. Kreutzer writes that the devout soul also figures in the story of David playing his lyre to draw the evil spirit from King Saul (1 Sam. 16:23). The church fathers drew comparisons between the healing resonance of Christ’s flesh and David’s lyre.


129. Clémentz, “Vom Balsam der Antoniner,” 14; Kühn, “Grünewald Insheimer Altar,” 357ff.; and Behling, *Die Pflanze*, 140–47. Kühn’s and Behling’s studies compare the painted plants with illustrations from the works of the so-called German founders of botanical studies, Hieronymus Bock, Otto Brunfels, and Leonhart Fuchs, to determine a plant’s medicinal or symbolic purpose in a painting.


138. The celebration of the wood of the cross in the domestication of vines forms the subtext for the *Geistlicher Herol* and *Geistliche Weitbre* allegories, the autumnal pendents to the *Geistlicher Mai*. Bonaventure’s *Lignum vitae* and *Vitis mystica* set the precedent for tandem devotional treatises that overlay religious themes on fall and spring imagery. Bryda, “Tree, Vine, and Herb,” 191–166; Dietrich, “Geistliche Weinrebe,” in *Schmiddeke, Die deutsche Literatur*, 1880–81; Seegets, *Passionstologie*, 108–12; and Thomas, *Die Darstellung Christi*, 176–79.

139. The inscription to the drawing reads: “Ich pin Jhs daz kindlein und prin vil wersr icen in meinem körblein (I am the Infant Jesus and bring a good year [a New Year’s gift] in my little basket); Fridolin, *Der geistliche Mai*, fol. 261r. For more on the topic of New Year’s greetings (Neujahrsgrüße), see Hamburger, *Nunc as Artisti*, 192ff.

