

Stigmatics

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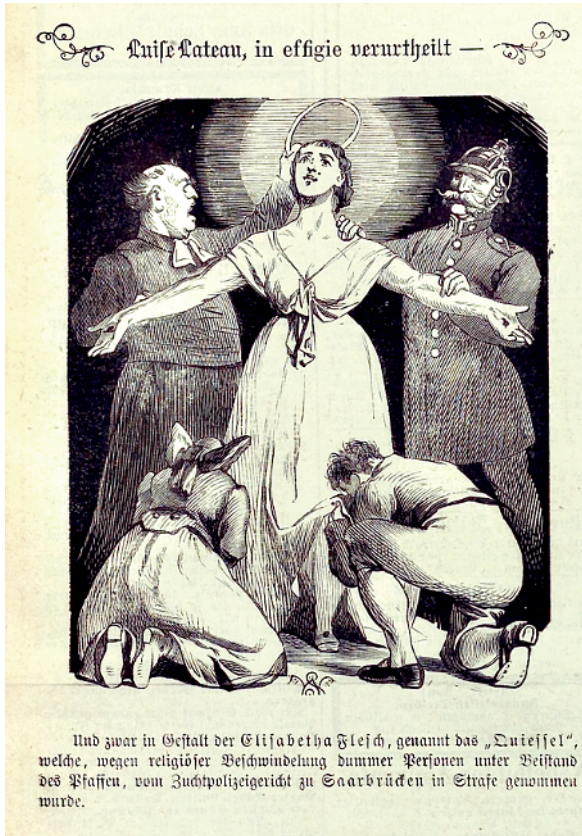


FIGURE 1.1
“Luise Lateau, in effigie
verurtheilt,” *Beiblatt
zum Kladderadatsch*, 28.51
(7 November 1875):
1. “Louise Lateau
condemned in effigy – in
the figure of Elisabeth
Fleisch, known as the ‘bigot,’
who was arrested by the
police court in Saarbrücken
for religiously swindling
credulous people with the
help of the clergy”
HEIDELBERG UNIVERSITY,
*BEIBLATT ZUM
KLADDERADATSCH*, 28.51
(7 NOVEMBER 1875): 1,
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1 Introduction

In November 1875, the German anti-Catholic periodical *Kladderadatsch* published a cartoon of a young woman, her arms outstretched, bleeding from her hands and feet. On the left, a priest holds an aureole over her head, raising her to a saintly level. Two devotees praying at her feet support this impression

of her as an object of devotion. On the right, a police officer (bearing no small resemblance to Otto von Bismarck himself), personifying the public authorities, attempts to lead her away from the scene.¹ The cartoon contains all the stock images used for visual warfare during the culture wars, and illustrates the Bismarckian ideal of the liberal-rationalist nation with no place for Catholic wonders. What is more surprising here are the caption and the description next to the cartoon. The caption described Elisabeth as a “bigot” who had been arrested by the Saarbrücken police court “for religiously swindling credulous people with the help of the clergy.” The title, “Louise Lateau condemned in effigy,” suggests that the negative verdict on Elisabeth Flesch (c.1821–?) also reflected negatively on Louise Lateau (1850–1883). With this verdict, the *Kladderadatsch* suggested that the court had in fact also rejected the Belgian Lateau, with Elisabeth Flesch standing for, or as a representative image of, Lateau. Similarly, in the same issue we read: “[T]he ‘bigot’ Elisabeth Flesch, who played the stigmatic following the model of Lateau, was convicted for fraud.”² The cartoon and short article aptly capture some of the ideas we address in this book. In the description of the court case against Elisabeth Flesch, it appears that the phrase claiming she “played the stigmatic” did not need further explanation, nor did the name “Lateau.” However, what was a “stigmatic”? Why did the Belgian stigmatic Louise Lateau feature as a point of reference?

We cannot address these questions without first introducing some caveats concerning the word “stigmatic.” We will discuss its use in more detail towards the end of this chapter, but for our purpose here, it is important to know that its use was more rare than we expected, and more complex. It was more rare because, while the equivalents of “stigmatic” seemed to be well-known and well-used words in nineteenth-century French (“stigmatisé”), German (“Stigmatisierte”) and Dutch (“gestigmatiseerde”) sources, in Italian (“stigmatizzato/a”) and Spanish (“estigmatizada”), the word was not used until the late nineteenth century and, even then, its use remained limited (e.g. in reference to an international stigmatic). This meant that what we thought would be a study of “stigmatics” and their reception in different countries, in fact needed to start with a more thorough reflection on what a “stigmatic” actually was and who referred to them as such. In other words, we needed to study the historical use of a word that had never really been questioned by scholars who

1 On the importance of Louise Lateau in the German *Kulturkampf*, see Van Osselaer, “Stigmata.”

2 “Im Kreise Ottweiler ist das ‘Quiessel’ Elisabeth Flesch, welche sich nach dem Recept Lateau als Stigmatisierte ausspielte wegen Betrugs verurtheilt worden.” The article had the title, “Für Majunke,” a reference to the German priest and journalist who was a major promotor of the Belgian stigmatic Louise Lateau (See Chapter 4, and Van Osselaer, “Stigmata, prophecies”). “Für Majunke,” *Kladderadatsch* (1875): 203.

had studied “stigmatics.”³ Secondly, as we studied its use, it became clear that it was more complex than expected, since “stigmatic” seemed to refer to two different phenomena: a specific category of mystics (with different profiles but all reportedly carrying the stigmata) and a particular type of “stigmatic,” the stereotypical stigmatic of the nineteenth century. It is the latter that caught our interest and became the central topic of this book.

In this book, we argue that the Lateau-like “stigmatic” developed as a new type of mystic in the nineteenth century. The word referred to a young woman who displayed the physical stigmata – wounds of Christ – on her body and relived Christ’s Passion. Although these women might have experienced other mystical phenomena, the fact that they were carrying Christ’s wounds was their defining feature. People carrying the stigmata have been heralded since the first reports of St Francis (who received the stigmata in 1224). Thus, if the phenomenon is much older, why do we situate the development of the “stigmatic” in the nineteenth century? As we will demonstrate in the following chapters, we believe that the development of the type and its popularity had much to do with the fact that during the period in question stigmatics could be regarded as “saints” and religious “celebrities,” where both categories were historically contingent.⁴ The stigmatic type was aligned with contemporary popular ideas of what sanctity was – although these were not the ideas of the Church – with a focus on the miraculous body as proof of the divine. They were the religious celebrities of their time. Their fame was marketable and knowledge about them spread through the modern media. Moreover, because of the publicity given to the type, they became increasingly well known, recognizable and a phenomenon that could be imitated.

In order to fully grasp the meaning of the “stigmatic” (as a category and type), we adopted an inclusive approach and looked at sources produced at different levels in the Catholic communities. We were as interested in “religion as prescribed” as we were in “religion as practised.”⁵ Who was talking about “stigmatics”? We looked at the top of the Catholic hierarchy in the decisions of the Vatican congregations, ventured into the diocesan archives and studied sources produced by the local clergy, as well as addressing the ideas and

3 However, its use as a category of historical analysis has been questioned. Liliana Billanovich prefers not to use it and calls for a more inclusive approach to mystical women, arguing that we should not single out the stigmata, as this risks diminishing the other phenomena that were attributed to these women. Billanovich, *Una nuova ‘invasione mistica,’* 38. This book, however, addresses the “stigmatic” as a historical category (used by contemporaries) and a specific type of mystic, the stereotypical stigmatic.

4 We discuss this in Chapter 2.

5 Christian, *Local Religion*, 178.

practices of Catholic laymen and women. Our investigations showed that the “stigmatic” was not used as an organizational category in the Vatican files that discussed the women who displayed the stigmata (these files concerned religious deviance, beatification and canonization processes). In fact, the Vatican congregations (*in casu* the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith⁶ and the Congregation for the Causes of Saints⁷) were quite critical of the phenomenon of stigmatization and preferred, for example, not to mention the stigmata (or mystical epiphenomena in general) when announcing the beatification or canonization of some of these women.⁸ We will discuss this more thoroughly in our chapter on the Vatican response (Chapter 7), but for our introduction to the concept of the “stigmatic” here, this means that we cannot start our discussion of the use of the word and of the development of the stereotypical “stigmatic” at the top of the Catholic hierarchy.

So, where did we find the word? As the following chapters and our discussion of the “stigmatic” as a category and type will show, the term was used by Catholics with different backgrounds and professions: Catholic writers, doctors, journalists, priests, farmers and others. Moreover, its use was not limited to Catholic discourse: we also found it in anti-Catholic sources, such as the *Kladderadatsch* article cited at the start of this chapter. Consequently, if we wanted to understand the use of the word and the meaning and impact of a stigmatic, we could not limit ourselves to religious sources. Therefore, we approached its circulation as part of “popular culture” in the way Gordon Lynch understands this: “as the shared environment, practices and resources of everyday life.”⁹ Within Catholic sources, we could see a difference in the use of the word. “Stigmatic” as a category featured in expert¹⁰ narratives, such as lists of stigmatics (some of which we will discuss in this chapter). In non-Catholic sources or non-expert Catholic sources, the word primarily referred to the stigmatic type.

By distinguishing between the Vatican at the top of the Catholic hierarchy and the rest of the Catholic world in the use of the word “stigmatic,” we did not want to create the impression of two Catholicisms, an elite version and a popular one, or describe popular Catholicism as an archaic residue.¹¹ As noted, Catholics of different rank and profession used the word “stigmatic.” Nevertheless,

6 Former Roman Inquisition, 1542–1908 and Holy Office, 1908–1965.

7 Former Sacred Congregation of Rites, 1888–1969.

8 This did however not mean that the Vatican did not believe in the possibility of the wounds (see Chapter 7). As we will see, *La Civiltà Cattolica*, the unofficial periodical of the Vatican, published articles criticizing the rationalist approach.

9 Gordon Lynch, *Understanding Theology and Popular Culture* (London: Routledge, 2005, 15), cited in Schofield Clark, “Why study?,” 15.

10 Here, this means anyone who focused on the phenomenon of stigmatization.

11 On the use of “popular” religion and its problems, see e.g. Dawson, “The concept”; Possamai, “Popular and lived religions.”

researching stigmatics in Europe meant studying a hierarchically organized Catholic culture, and we could not ignore the fact that cases of stigmatization not seldom involved moments when the hierarchical order of the Catholic Church was evoked and confirmed. In this regard, it is important to note that the enthusiasm for “stigmatics” – the devotions that developed around them – emerged from the bottom up. Similar to the modern Marian apparition movements that Peter Jan Margry has studied, these stigmatic-focused movements were “grassroots movements,” had an informal character, occurred outside the usual framework of the Roman Catholic Church and each operated “in practice ... independently.”¹² Margry thus situates these movements “in an ecclesiastical no-man’s land. In this devotional ‘open territory’, manifestations and revelations can be shaped, appropriated, idiosyncratically crafted, and spread according to the wishes of the visionaries and their following of devotees.”¹³

Various ecclesiastical authorities (such as the Vatican congregations, bishops) responded to the stigmatic movements. The following chapters include episodes in which the church authorities intervened, declaring the stigmatic not worthy of veneration; as counter to phenomena the ecclesiastical authorities would approve or wish to communicate; or rejecting enthusiasm for a stigmatic as “religious deviance.”¹⁴ In these discussions, we follow Peter Jan Margry’s approach to “deviancy” as something that relates to the “‘mainstream’ that is regarded as not deviant, and which some people see as the norm or normal (in this case the Roman Catholic Church). But norms change over time and what was once deviant may at some stage lose its status of deviancy.”¹⁵ Such definitional boundaries were, in Joseph Laycock’s opinion, not self-evident but “exercises of power.”¹⁶ As Peter Jan Margry has noted concerning apparition

12 Margry, “New transnational religious cultures,” 205: “deviant devotions”: “These devotional manifestations occur outside of the usual formal framework of the Roman Catholic Church, bore or bare a strong personal or private character, and, moreover, are of relatively recent nature. As a rule, (ibid. 206) these modern devotions have an informal character, and are not recognized by the Church, are still being investigated by ecclesiastical authorities, or have been entirely rejected.” Ibid. 211: “they are not shaped within official ecclesiastical structures, but spiritually and in terms of devotional rituals are shaped, profiled and propagated from the bottom up, in an informal manner, with the aid of visionaries, their own cult leadership, and groups of devotees.” Margry, “The global network,” 667. While these contemporary apparition movements seem to share many characteristics with the movements we studied, our movements seem less critical of the vested Church institutions, and would not qualify as “countermovements.”

13 Margry, “The global network,” 673.

14 On such moments of intervention, see McGuire, *Lived Religion*, 23–4.

15 Margry, “The global network,” 668.

16 Laycock, *The Seer*, x. For Laycock, 197: “The future of religious historiography” lies in “becoming more attentive to how and why the boundaries of imagined communities are challenged, policed, and negotiated. Church authorities tend to exert power over these boundaries through encyclicals, letters, and proclamations.”

movements, they were seldom fully excommunicated, since the Catholic Church was “relatively tolerant leaving some space for ‘experiments’, and practices an active ‘ignore policy.’” “The Church,” as he notes, “is prepared to channel and control and start an investigation only if the movement becomes too big, showing a tendency towards major heresy, or attracts a great deal of public attention, but it remains eager in such cases to smother the movement nonetheless.”¹⁷

Nevertheless, we should be wary of assuming that all members of the clergy were critical of or even opposed to stigmatics. As we will see, some of them (including bishops and other high-ranked dignitaries) supported some of the stigmatics and even participated in their promotion. Moreover, posthumous enthusiasm for a stigmatic differed from the enthusiasm that a living stigmatic triggered. The *fama sanctitatis* (reputation of sanctity) and a miracle linked to the cult were necessary for the beatification of a stigmatic.¹⁸ As scholars working on the beatification and canonization of “folk saints” have shown, the Catholic Church’s official endorsement of a cult could in fact invigorate the Church. Official approval was not only about controlling the enthusiasm of the followers but also concerned the value of a particular case as a potential charisma boost for the Pope.¹⁹

However, the fact that these movements (and enthusiasm in general) developed around a living individual explains both the grassroots character of the movement and the unease of the Church authorities (as veneration of a living person is not allowed). While devotion to a stigmatic was not unlike enthusiasm for an ecstatic or a fasting girl, it was inherently different from the devotions that were officially approved and/or popularized by Rome (such as the Sacred Heart devotion, the cult of the popes, and the Virgin of Lourdes). The enthusiasm also differed from apparition movements, as these sacralized the apparition sites, not the living or dead visionary.²⁰ Moreover, official support for an apparition could follow relatively quickly after the initial events. The ecclesiastical authorities could approve of the religious enthusiasm that

17 Margry, “The global network,” 669.

18 More on this, see Chapter 7.

19 “Die sancti ‘von oben’ fungieren in dieser Sicht nicht nur als Charismenkontrolle, sondern auch als Charisma-Akku für den Papst oder als Umspannstation für die charismatische Energie der Heiligen auf den Papst.” Lüdecke, “Heiligsprechung,” 247; Bienfait, “Zeichen,” 19.

20 Hence, the name of the apparitions refers to the sites rather than the visionaries: for example, the apparitions of Fatima, La Salette and Beauraing. Notable exceptions of modern visionaries who were canonized: Bernadette Soubirous (Lourdes, 1858) and Francisco and Jacinta Marto, the young visionaries of Fatima (1917).

developed at a site (e.g. approval of the apparition) even during the lifetime of the visionaries.²¹

Since the stigmatic movements were grassroots movements, they were anchored in specific local contexts and thus showed great diversity.²² Nevertheless, they developed in the context of a global Catholic Church, with a shared tradition, hierarchy and normative framework.²³ Moreover, some of these movements (especially if they developed in the same region and around the same time) had overlapping devotee support and could thus be considered part of a network.²⁴ Furthermore, as we will discuss in more detail in the second chapter, it was not uncommon for a stigmatic to generate transnational interest and for intense press coverage to spread their fame at the regional, national and even international levels. While we are aware that much of the enthusiasm for stigmatics was religiously motivated, we do want to highlight that the religious framework did not function in isolation. As we will discuss in the following pages and chapters (e.g. Chapter 2 on celebrities and saints), the “stigmatic,” considered generally, was a public religious phenomenon shaped in interaction with other cultural circuits (such as the mass media and the commercial circuit).²⁵

It is important to recall here that we did not want to impose a preconceived idea of what a “stigmatic” was on our sources, but aimed to understand what

21 Laycock, *The Seer*, 12: “Different circumstances, however, have inspired Church authorities to embrace devotional culture in order to channel popular support against an outside threat.” On similar efforts at the Marian apparition shrine in Lourdes to “institutionalise popular worship” and to “domesticate grassroots devotion by imposing a sense of Catholic orthodoxy on both the physical appearance of the site [...] and the ritual activities that took place there,” see Kaufman, “Les miraculées,” 521.

22 Christian, *Local Religion*, 178: “local religion is localistic.”

23 Laycock, *The Seer*, 8: “But despite these differences, Catholics are able to understand themselves as part of a global polity unified through such institutional symbols as apostolic succession, the body of canon law, and, especially, the office of pope and authority of the magisterium.” Referring to Leonard Primiano (ibid. 8), who claimed that “‘official’ religion does not, in fact, exist,” Laycock argues that “normative religion exists only in the abstract. This situation in which vernacular practices are united by an imagined normative ideal is especially true of Catholicism, which has countless varied and local expressions throughout the world.” On the geographical diversity of Catholicism: see McGuire, *Lived Religion*, 25, Christian, *Local Religion*, 178.

24 Margry, “The global network,” 669. See e.g. the cases studied in Chapter 4.

25 In this respect, our approach follows in the footsteps of e.g. Suzanne Kaufman, Sophia Deboick and Donn James Tilson. Kaufman, “Miraculées,” 518: “The Catholic Church was quick to adopt and even innovate the tools of modern industrial society (newspapers, advertising, photography, and later, film) to promote devotional models of sanctity for a mass audience of Catholic consumers”; Tilson, *The Promotion*, 4; Deboick, “Céline Martin’s images.”

it meant to contemporaries, and to study this use and development. We maintain that the Louise Lateau-type developed into the stereotypical “stigmatic” in the nineteenth century, but also suggest that caution should prevail. While “the stigmatic,” following “the recipe of Lateau,” became a type in the nineteenth century, this did not exclude reports of other types of mystics carrying stigmata. In fact, in the modern era, stigmatic experts traced reports on stigmata (in all their variations) in the past and present and grouped under the category of “stigmatic.” Before focusing on the Louise Lateau-like “stigmatic” type, this chapter first addresses the instances in which people with stigmata were singled out, and examines the reasons why this happened. We will look at retrospective lists, but also at moments and locations in which there was an increase in interest. Thus, rather than examining individual cases of stigmatization, as other scholars have done,²⁶ the focus here is on the phenomenon itself: on those people who contemporaries regarded as stigmatics; and on the fact that stigmata became the selection criterion. In order to do so, we adopted a transnational and comparative approach. As the second part of this chapter will show, this approach has inspired questions about the category itself and about the use of the word “stigmatic.” Reflecting on the category of the stigmatic helped us delineate the specificity of the “stigmatic” type.

2 Tracing Stigmata

2.1 *Retrospective Lists. On the Reinvention of “Stigmata”*

In her article on stigmata in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, Xenia von Tippelskirch reflected on the list of stigmatics identified as such by the French doctor Antoine Imbert-Gourbeyre (1825–1888) in his *magnum opus*, *La stigmatisation* (1894). Examining the seventeenth-century cases he listed, she remarked that many of them were only singled out as a case of stigmatization in the nineteenth century, that their listing was an example of the “reinvention of stigmata,”²⁷ and his inclusion of them implied a retrospective interpretation of their cases.²⁸ For Imbert-Gourbeyre, carrying the stigmata

26 See e.g. Kane on the American stigmatic Sister Thorn (*Sister Thorn*); Priesching on Maria von Mörl (*Maria von Mörl*); Seeger on Theresa Neumann (*Resl von Konnersreuth*); Heimann on Teresa Higginson (“Medical and mystical opinion”).

27 Von Tippelskirch, “Schmerzen,” 161; and von Tippelskirch, “Ma fille,” 260.

28 “l’interprétation retrospective” in Von Tippelskirch, “Ma fille,” 275. For the origin of the word “stigma,” its use in antiquity as a mark impressed on one’s body and its history, see Adnès, “Stigmates,” c. 1211–1213.

became the most important characteristic, on the basis of which mystics with different profiles could be grouped together.²⁹

In this book, we continue in this vein and postulate that the increased emphasis on stigmata resulted in a specific subcategory of mystics who became known as stigmatics. The main structuring feature, the selection criterion for this group, was bearing the wounds of Christ. In arguing this, we do not want to suggest that Imbert-Gourbeyre invented the stigmatic. The word “stigmatisée” was used long before the release of Imbert-Gourbeyre’s book, and one of the stigmatics that caught his attention was Louise Lateau (1850–1883), already known as “la stigmatisée de Bois d’Haine.”³⁰ What we do want to suggest is that his use of the word “stigmatisé[e]” and the creation of a list of alleged stigmatics points to an increasing interest in them. This interest was a reflection of, or reflected in, a rise in the number of reports about such cases in the nineteenth century and the development of a stereotypical stigmatic image. Tellingly, the nineteenth century has been called the “golden era” of stigmatization in Europe.³¹ New cases were reported and older cases were reinvented in extensive lists. Studying these lists, we came across hundreds of names of individuals who allegedly carried the wounds, from the middle ages up until the twenty-first century. What became increasingly clear however is that each of these lists had its own logic. If we wanted to study the phenomenon, we needed to reflect on this material first: what information were the lists providing us with?

“Stigmatics” became an increasingly specific and relevant category singled out in the prosopographical lists that were compiled beginning in the early nineteenth century. Interestingly, the frames of reference of their creators differed considerably and we find such lists, for example, in religious and medical contexts. One of the oldest relevant texts is the overview of “stigmatics” throughout the centuries provided by Joseph von Görres in the second volume of his *Die christliche Mystik* which included an entire chapter on them (1837).³² This text, in which stigmata are perceived as a divine gift, addressed all types of stigmatics. Görres’s work became well known and featured as a source of reference for other lists, such as *Die Stigmatisierten des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts*

29 This selection logic was in fact also apparent in the title of Imbert-Gourbeyre’s first two-volume book on the topic, *Les stigmatisées* (1873).

30 Anonymous, *La stigmatisée de Bois-d’Haine* (1871).

31 Bouflet, *Les stigmatisés*, 89; Pahud de Mortanges, “Irre,” 203.

32 Görres wrote about stigmata as part of his long series, *Die christliche Mystik* (1836–1842), and visited Maria von Mörl in Tyrol. An English extract of *Die christliche Mystik* was published posthumously, with additions on Lazzari and Lateau made by the translators. See Görres, *Stigmata*.

(1877), published by an anonymous “Curatprieſter” in the miſt of the German *Kulturkampf*.³³ The latter liſted ſhort hagiographical biographies intended to provide the devotees with a new ſource of comfort and the non-believers with a new reaſon to deſpair. The German booklet not only drew upon Görres’s work, but alſo made reference to, for example, the compilations created by Dr Antoine Imbert-Gourbeyre.³⁴ As noted above, Imbert-Gourbeyre provided a liſt of ſtigmatics with his books *Les ſtigmatisées* (1873) and, eſpecially, *La ſtigmatisation* (1894), in which he adopted a more hiſtorical approach and included nearly 300 caſes ſince St Francis. Theſe liſts have nourished all kinds of compilations on ſtigmatics ſince, with authors adopting a number of different approaches.

In conſidering why different authors decided to publiſh theſe compilations on ſtigmatics we need to take into account the politico-religious and ſcientific background in which their liſts appeared. In the caſe of Imbert-Gourbeyre, his books were publiſhed during the anticlerical Third Republic and following traumatic events ſuch as the French defeat in the Franco-Prussian war and the Paris Commune. As ſcholars ſuch as Thomas Kselman have pointed out, after ſuch turmoil, Catholics in France became increasingly concerned with the need to atone for the ſins committed againſt religion, for which they thought their nation was being puniſhed.³⁵ Stigmatics incarnated this type of ſpirituality and received the ſupport of the ultramontane and the Catholic ariſtocracy, who had loſt their privileges after the French Revolution. As a reſult of the ſupport received, many ſtigmatics in France, but alſo abroad, began to prophesize about a reſtoration of the monarchy and the return of the *Ancien Régime*. Being a fervent Legitiſt, Imbert-Gourbeyre became eſpecially cloſe to Palma Matarrelli and Marie-Julie Jahenny (1850–1941), who prophesized the riſe of Henri V, the triumph of Pope Pius IX (the “prisoner of the Vatican”) and the reſtoration of a “Catholic Kingdom.”³⁶ According to Joachim Bouflet, the ſucceſs of Imbert-Gourbeyre was partly linked to the Catholic and Legitiſt hopes that theſe and other living ſtigmatics incarnated. In addition, what turned *Les ſtigmatisées* into a beſtſeller was the journaliſtic ſtyle he uſed in the (hi)ſtories of the ſtigmatics he chronicled.³⁷

33 On the political context and the reference to ſtigmatics, ſee Van Oſſelaer, “Stigmata.”

34 For a biographical note, ſee Forthomme, “Imbert-Gourbeyre de la Touche.” Some of Imbert-Gourbeyre’s papers can be found in: Fonds Paul LeBlanc, BP Clermont-Ferrand, A70199.

35 Kselman, *Miracles*, 109–110.

36 Sandoni, “Political mobilization,” 20–24.

37 Bouflet, “Avant-propos,” 9.

With regard to the scientific context, the nineteenth century is renowned for a medicalized approach to allegedly supernatural phenomena. As Jan Goldstein has demonstrated, this pathologizing also had political and secularizing intentions. In her words, “[t]he redefinition of the supernatural as the natural-pathological went further and had the effect of debunking religion; it was consonant with the frenetic crusade for laicization which marked republican politics in this era.”³⁸ Jacques Maître described it as a battle between “scientism” and “miraculism,” where the liberals and republicans fought the ultramontane and aristocrat intent to promote a Catholic monarchic restoration through the use of the supernatural.³⁹ In response to the pathologizing campaigns, Imbert-Gourbeyre’s *La stigmatisation* explicitly argued “against the free-thinkers of the Salpêtrière.” He thus confronted rationalist authors such as Alfred Maury, who in 1855, after the fervour created by stigmatics in Tyrol, published an essay in the *Annales médico-psychologiques* debunking stigmatization since St Francis.⁴⁰

Despite Imbert-Gourbeyre’s attempt to refute the materialist approach to the stigmata, the medical context continued to inspire compilations on stigmatics at the *fin-de-siècle*, embedded in the above-mentioned quest for political and social emancipation from the Church. Following the trend set by medical case studies to debunk popular stigmatics such as Louise Lateau,⁴¹ psychiatrists and physicians enlarged the scope to create lists of past and present stigmatics, making retrospective diagnoses of St Francis or Catherine of Siena, and explaining contemporary cases from the psychopathological point of view. Here, again, the criterion for selecting the cases was merely the bearing of the wounds understood in general terms. “Medical lists” of stigmatics included many cases of alleged stigmatization taking place in asylums, such as the famous Madeleine Lebouc (1853–1918), the “hysterical” patient of Pierre Janet at the Salpêtrière.⁴² The late nineteenth century was the heyday of hypnotism in Europe and many physicians acknowledged the power of suggestion to provoke “holy” wounds, as had been allegedly proven in experiments

38 Goldstein, “The hysteria diagnosis,” 236.

39 Maître, “De Bourneville à nos jours,” 769–770.

40 Maury, “Les mystiques extatiques,” 181–232. See also: Maury, *La magie et l’astrologie*, 339–414.

41 Bourneville, *Science et miracle*, 26–64.

42 Janet, *De l’angoisse à l’extase*. On Madeleine Lebouc and Janet see Maître, *Une inconnue célèbre*. Another psychiatrist we can cite is the German Walter Jacobi (1889–1937), later a member of the SS, who was also convinced that medicine could explain the medieval and modern stigmatics, Jacobi, *Die Stigmatisierten*, 1–2.

by Burot and Bourru.⁴³ A representative “medical list” recording this trend was that of the French doctor Maurice Apte, who analysed the maladies of medieval and contemporary stigmatics in his medical doctorate, advancing theories of suggestion, dermatographism and hysteria.⁴⁴ Not all medical lists were as pathologizing, but their interest remained in analysing stigmatics throughout history from the psychophysiological perspective, without pointing at a specific type.⁴⁵

The medical interest in stigmatics also stimulated the creation of what we might call a Catholic counter-list. From 1888 onwards, for example, a series of articles on mystical phenomena appeared in *La Civiltà Cattolica*, the Jesuit-led unofficial periodical of the Vatican. “Le estasi, la medicina e la Chiesa” (“The ecstasies, the medical profession and the Church”) introduced the famous contemporary ecstasies (among which were several stigmatics), Alexandrine Lanois, Marie Bergadieu (1829–1904, stigmata 1874), Maria von Mörl (1812–1868, stigmata 1834) and especially Louise Lateau (1850–1883, stigmata 1868),⁴⁶ and criticized medical experts such as Charcot, Maury and Warlomont (who had examined Louise Lateau).⁴⁷ The articles emphasized that the Church only sanctified its heroes after confirming the heroic virtues of the candidate and not because of their display of extraordinary phenomena. The latter were viewed with suspicion and carefully analysed by special committees in relation to both their theological and scientific aspects. From the medical-pathological point of view, they supported the contrasting opinions of doctors who, like Ferdinand Lefebvre,⁴⁸ asserted the scientific inexplicability of the cases. A year later, in 1889, *La Civiltà Cattolica* opposed the rationalist approach anew and included a study focusing solely on stigmata (defined as one of the most important gifts of God, with only ecstasy outranking it). This time there was no mention of the sanctification processes, the purpose of the article was to demonstrate the “historical and factual reality,” or at least the potential divine origin of stigmata, through the case of Louise Lateau. The Jesuits, however, included

43 Bourru and Burot, *Variations de la personnalité*, Chapter 6, esp. 113. On hypnosis and stigmatization: Imbert-Gourbeyre, *L'Hypnotisme et la stigmatisation*.

44 Apte, *Les stigmatisés*, esp. 8–9.

45 For example, the Belgian doctor Albert Bessemans left open the question as to whether science would succeed in explaining all cases of stigmatization, and linked the belief in the stigmata to the faith of those who examined them. Bessemans, *De stigmatisatie*, 46.

46 “Le estasi, la medicina e la Chiesa (I–IV),” *Civ. Cat.* 39, 11 (1888), 267–281, 533–547.

47 “Le estasi, la medicina e la Chiesa (V–IX),” *Civ. Cat.* 39, 12 (1888), 33–50, 400–413; “Le estasi, la medicina e la Chiesa,” *Civ. Cat.* 40, 1 (1889): 8–24.

48 Klaniczay, “Louise Lateau.”

her in a long Catholic tradition of over 50 cases, starting with St Francis (with Görres featuring as a point of reference).⁴⁹

The medical approach to the stigmata declined by the late 1930s, when theories of hysteria and hypnosis lost credibility in psychiatric practice.⁵⁰ As a result, publishing overviews of stigmatics from the medical point of view ceased to be a novelty.⁵¹ The political context had also changed: France, the champion in the pathologizing of religion, had enacted the triumph of laicism with the 1905 law of the separation of Church and State.⁵² By the mid-twentieth century, lists of stigmatics were published mainly by Catholic scholars, with the intention to either revive the Catholic belief in stigmatics or, on the contrary, to restrain the penchant for the supernatural.

Some of the lists published at the time attempted to direct the attention of the Church to the positive impact that stigmatics had on Catholic faith. They did not intend to highlight a type of stigmatic in particular, but to recognize the Catholic mission of the bearers of the wounds throughout history. By way of example, we can mention the German Catholic writer and publisher, Johannes Höcht (1901–1966), who defended the edifying role of the stigmatics' suffering for Catholicism and criticized Imbert-Gourbeyre for focusing his attention on the wonders of stigmatics rather than their virtues.⁵³ Höcht's book was first published in 1951 and has had several new editions since (the sixth was published in 2004), illustrating the continuing interest in the phenomenon and list-making. New biographies were added to Höcht's original list even after the death of the author.⁵⁴

49 "Luisa Lateau o l'estatica stigmatizzata di Bois-d'Haine," in "Le estasi, la medicina e la Chiesa. Estasi e stigmatate. Le stigmatate nella storia della mistica cristiana," *Civ. Cat.* 40, 1 (1889), 669–682, 673–683. See e.g. St Francis, Catherine of Racconigi, Veronica Giuliani, Isabella Hendrickx, Maria von Mörl, LL. *La Civiltà Cattolica* explained the more cautious position of the Church in an article about mystical phenomena in 1888–1889. "Le stigmatate classiche della mistica cristiana," *Civ. Cat.* 40, 3 (1889): 669–683, 680.

50 Micale, "On the 'disappearance' of hysteria," 496–526.

51 An exception is Lhermitte, *Mystiques et faux mystiques*, 77–97.

52 Haupt, "Religion and nation in Europe," 81.

53 Höcht, *Träger der Wundmale Christi*, 1951 edition, 6.

54 For a present-day example of such lists, see that of Michael Freze, a Franciscan tertiary. In addition to narrating the best-known cases of stigmatization in history, from St Francis to Marthe Robin, Freze made a small inquiry into alleged living stigmatics, which confirmed to him the Christian "mystery" of the stigmata, Freze, *They bore the wounds of Christ*, 255–289. Using a similar style, the German Catholic writer Michael Hesemann dedicated his book to John Paul II and examined the life and afterlife of "classic" stigmatics such as Emmerick. To keep the phenomenon alive, Hesemann also mentioned recent cases of stigmatization that physicians could not explain, Hesemann, *Stigmata*, 11–23.

Höcht and other Catholic authors publishing enthusiastic compilations on stigmatics, such as the British clergyman Montague Summers (1880–1948), were known for their unshakable faith in other supernatural phenomena, such as Marian apparitions.⁵⁵ As a result, such works were said to lack a critical approach, which was provided by more sceptical Catholic scholars, notably the British Jesuit priest Herbert Thurston (1856–1939). Thurston was renowned for his scepticism and his exposure of popular myths in the life of saints.⁵⁶ In his opinion, apart from St Francis, there were no conclusive cases of stigmata, although he remained undecided in some cases as regards the nature of their wounds. Popular stigmatics such as Marie-Julie Jahenny and Therese Neumann (1898–1962) were to him merely “religiously obsessed” or “neurotic” women, victims of what he called a “crucifixion complex.”⁵⁷ His works, *The Physical Phenomena of Mysticism* (1952) and *Surprising Mystics* (1955), sat alongside those of other priests who wished to express caution with regard to popular beliefs about mysticism, but also with regard to alleged supernatural phenomena outside Catholicism, such as poltergeists and clairvoyance.⁵⁸ Functioning almost as the “devil’s advocate” in canonization causes, their aim was to restrain popular enthusiasm over dubious cases, including all kinds of stigmatics (religious and lay, male and female) and support the vigilant attitude of the ecclesiastical hierarchy in acknowledging extraordinary phenomena.⁵⁹

To conclude, as mentioned above, the authors of lists of stigmatics selected their cases based on a general “category” of the stigmatic as the bearer of the holy wounds, visible or invisible. In the works of authors such as Imbert-Gourbeyre and Höcht, it is clear that they attempted to collect as many cases as possible that fulfilled this general criterion.

55 Summers also based his list (1950) on Imbert-Gourbeyre’s findings, but including the stars of his time: Padre Pio and Therese Neumann. He vindicated the authenticity of their cases, and claimed to have confidential information about other living stigmatics, Summers, *The Physical Phenomena of Mysticism*, 247.

56 He had the same attitude towards spiritualist phenomena, which he investigated as a member of the Society for Psychical Research. Heimann, “Thurston, Herbert.”

57 Other stigmatics acknowledged by the Church, such as Emmerick, were not spared similar judgements. Furthermore, he justified the caution the ecclesiastical authority showed with regards to Padre Pio, Thurston, *The Physical Phenomena*, 96, 109; Thurston, *Surprising Mystics*, 83, 163.

58 See, e.g. Father Staehlin’s work *Apariciones*. Staehlin’s papers are kept at the Archives of the Society of Jesus in Alcalá de Henares (Madrid). However, those concerning stigmatics and other mystical phenomena are not yet accessible.

59 About the figure of the devil’s advocate, see Vidal, “Miracles.”

We have drawn on these lists in our exploratory work, and created our own “list” of stigmatics as an appendix.⁶⁰ In particular, we focused on the frequent reports of stigmatization in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in countries that, according to Antoine Imbert-Gourbeyre (and others), produced the largest numbers of stigmatics: Italy, France, Germany, Spain and Belgium.⁶¹ Mapping these and putting them on a timeline allowed us to ask questions about stigmatics as products of their time and place. We will specifically ask about which time and what place they were reported.

2.2 *Moments of Increased Attention? The Place and Time of Stigmata*

What does it mean to regard someone claiming to suffer from stigmata as a “stigmatic”? The term, as it was conceptualized during the nineteenth century, did not inhabit a historically stable and ideologically neutral position, but was rather constructed and determined in relation to shifting cultural frames of reference. When Antoine Imbert-Gourbeyre depicted Palma Matarrelli as a “stigmatic” in *Les stigmatisées*, he inadvertently launched the notion of a transnational republic of stigmatized mystics, in which the Italian city of Oria in Puglia and the Belgian village of Bois-d’Haine were connected through the holy wounds: “Palma has known Louise [Lateau] for three years: she sees her, she calls her by her name when in ecstasy [...] On Good Friday last year, Palma was particularly surprised to see Louise having come to resemble the Crucified One, with swollen lips, pallid face, bleeding wounds, etc.”⁶² In accounts such as *Les stigmatisées*, in the purported words of the stigmatics themselves, and in publications that placed nineteenth-century stigmatics such as Matarrelli and Lateau side by side with stigmatized mystics of the Middle Ages, these divinely blessed figures were linked together across the boundaries of space and time. The link with the Middle Ages falls outside the present scope, but of note here is how this connection was presented either as a disruption of nineteenth-century religion, or as illustrative of longstanding continuity. These varying

60 For such an approach, see the work of Joachim Boufflet: the historian of religion and mysticism expands the list to include the stigmatics of the twentieth century. We are grateful to Joachim Boufflet for having shared his list with us.

61 Imbert-Gourbeyre, *La stigmatisation*, 571; Boufflet, *Les stigmatisés*, 21, the names of the countries are the same for the two centuries, their ranking is not. We will discuss the consequences of this selection below.

62 This connection was made explicit by Matarrelli herself. See Imbert-Gourbeyre, *Les stigmatisées. II. Palma d’Oria*, 3–4: “Depuis trois ans, Palma connaît Louise, elle la voit, elle l’appelle par son nom dans l’extase [...] Le Vendredi Saint de l’an dernier surtout, Palma fut fort étonnée de voir Louise devenue semblable au Crucifié, ayant les lèvres enflées, le visage comme livide, les plaies sanglantes, etc ...” For an examination of Imbert-Gourbeyre’s relationship with Matarrelli, see Klaniczay, “The stigmatized Italian visionary.”

representations naturally influenced how – and even *if* – mystics were singled out because of their stigmata. For the historian, it does not suffice to speak of “modern” stigmata solely in terms of continuity with the Middle Ages; one must also trace the fissures and fault-lines in the phenomenon’s development.

Two broader reflections on geography and chronology are therefore necessary at this stage. Imbert-Gourbeyre’s publication of *Les stigmatisées* in 1873 was motivated by the precarious, and in his eyes, severely unjust, situation in France after the humiliation at Versailles and the antireligious violence of the Paris Commune.⁶³ Stigmata, ecstasy and political prophecies could indeed be weaponized – sometimes successfully, sometimes quixotic – in quests (by others) against an array of perceived enemies of an intransigent Catholicism, from liberal politics to mechanized godless modernities. Of importance for our intentions here is how Imbert-Gourbeyre, in singling out stigmatics and situating them within a transnational community of supernaturally inclined mystics, laid the foundations for subsequent attempts at explaining stigmatics as manifestations of cultural anxieties bubbling to the surface in certain places, and at certain times.

Matters of geography and chronology have long posed methodological and narrative challenges for the historian of the religious supernatural. Epiphenomena such as stigmata, but also ecstasy or visions, are no longer the “lost souls of historiography” they were 30 years ago.⁶⁴ In recent decades, Western European religious history of the period under consideration in this book has turned its attention to religious phenomena. However, historians sometimes still maintain a certain reluctance to engage with them as *topoi* of religious beliefs and practices; and they do at times deploy “rituals of distancing,” to borrow a term Diane Purkiss used when reviewing the historiography of early modern witchcraft.⁶⁵ Distancing, in this context, implies that scholarship has focused on explaining away beliefs in epiphenomena or bypassing them entirely to focus instead on the circumstances in which epiphenomena such as stigmata could occur, rather than on the devotional meanings invested in them by the stigmatics themselves and their believers. This has resulted in a historiography characterized by an emphasis on the contested, symbolic spaces into which stigmatics were injected,⁶⁶ or on the scientific and pathological ramifications.⁶⁷

63 Sandoni, “Political mobilizations.”

64 Blackbourn, *Marpingen*, 13.

65 Purkiss, *The Witch*, 54.

66 For example, in the culture wars of the late nineteenth century, see Chapter 4.

67 Marques, “Experiencing Religion.”

One consequence of this approach is that, despite the overwhelming majority of female stigmatics, the focus is often on men (it was mostly men) who went to observe them and the opinions that they formed, and on those experts (also men) who took it upon themselves to record “superstitions,” feeding into narrative myths of the “stigmatic chaser” (Imbert-Gourbeyre) or other “privileged curious” as great male scientists in the nineteenth century. In this regard, the scholarly attention that Imbert-Gourbeyre and his *Les stigmatisées* have received compared to Matarrelli is illustrative.⁶⁸ Both approaches emphasize the stigmatic in the largely passive role assigned to them by their contemporaries: as a symbol or as an object of science. The symbolic significance attributed to stigmatics has proven to be a particularly compelling framework for explaining why they rose to the fore in certain circumstances. Religious epiphenomena have predominantly been explained as products of their “environment,” which takes on both a geographical and a chronological form. Locations and moments of particular socio-political and religious anxieties created a meaningful backdrop for religious supernatural epiphenomena to rise to public prominence.

In these histories that seek to explain the nineteenth and twentieth-century miraculous – inspired by materialist, sociological and cultural methodologies – certain components return again and again. They speak of socio-economic destitution of local communities, of religious (anti-Catholic) persecution, of regime changes and war, and of a range of cultural anxieties – a widespread mood of desperation. These instabilities, which profoundly disrupted daily life, to some extent help explain why stigmatics (and other epiphenomena) were singled out, and situate such events within larger social dynamics, whether the outbreak of a far-reaching economic crisis and the *Kulturkampf* in the 1870s or the political instability and Great Depression of the interwar period.⁶⁹

These components – wars, Church-State conflicts, socio-economic anxieties – need to be factored into the emergence in the nineteenth century of the archetypical “stigmatic” as a young, impressionable woman in an impoverished and devoutly Catholic rural setting, often in contested borderlands between emerging European nations where different forms of authority – regional, national and ecclesiastical – competed with each other. When charting occurrences of stigmata in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it indeed quickly becomes possible to distinguish trends that ground the phenomenon firmly in wider cultural contexts. It is certainly obvious that stigmata were not merely

68 Sandoni, “Political mobilizations”; Klaniczay, “The stigmatized Italian visionary.”

69 Blackburn, *Marpingen*; Christian, *Visionaries*.

“religious” in the general sense of a transcendent manifestation of an inner life, but were embedded in and interacting with their surroundings and times.

To create our corpus of cases of stigmatization, we drew upon lists of stigmatics (e.g. created by Antoine Imbert-Gourbeyre and Joachim Boufflet) and added new names we found through cross referencing, and published and unpublished sources. We thus followed the same logic as the creators of the original lists and used “stigmatic” as a category (thus references to alleged stigmatization, visible or invisible, as selection criteria).⁷⁰ We found 245 stigmatics (as a general category)⁷¹ and we used their biographical information to create a chronological chart (see Fig. 1.2) and a map (see Fig. 1.3). Throughout the period under examination in this book, three notable waves can be observed, during which stigmata and their bearers became publicly visible. All of them markedly coalesce with times that were clearly demarcated as moments of political and economic upheaval; moreover, they seem at first glance to be concentrated in regions characterized by particular instability and/or Catholic devotional impulses:

- (1) The first “advent” of stigmatics (as a general category not a specific type) occurred in the 1830s–1840s. It was primarily concentrated in the borderlands of the Italian States, the Habsburg Empire and the southern German states.⁷²
- (2) In the 1870s–1880s, we notice a second surge, running parallel to what was at the time dubbed the “Great Depression,” a prolonged period of global economic crisis that lasted until 1896.⁷³
- (3) A third wave crashed over Europe in the political and economic turmoil of the interwar period, although its momentum began with the onset and trauma of the First World War.⁷⁴

As this succinct chronological overview shows, it may be tempting to overlay waves of reports of supernatural events (similar chronologies of rises and falls have previously been constructed for other phenomena, most extensively for

⁷⁰ See the list, with biographies, at the end of the book.

⁷¹ For a chart including the numbers of stigmatics as a type, see Fig. 1.4, which we discuss below.

⁷² See Gißibl, *Frömmigkeit*, 12: rise in occurrences in the episcopacy of Munich Freising in this period.

⁷³ Blackbourn similarly saw in the economic conditions of the newly unified German nation the main explanation for the cluster of Marian apparitions in Marpingen. Blackbourn, *Marpingen*.

⁷⁴ The Great War has in recent years received bountiful attention from scholars of religion and the supernatural. See, e.g. Davies, *A Supernatural War*.

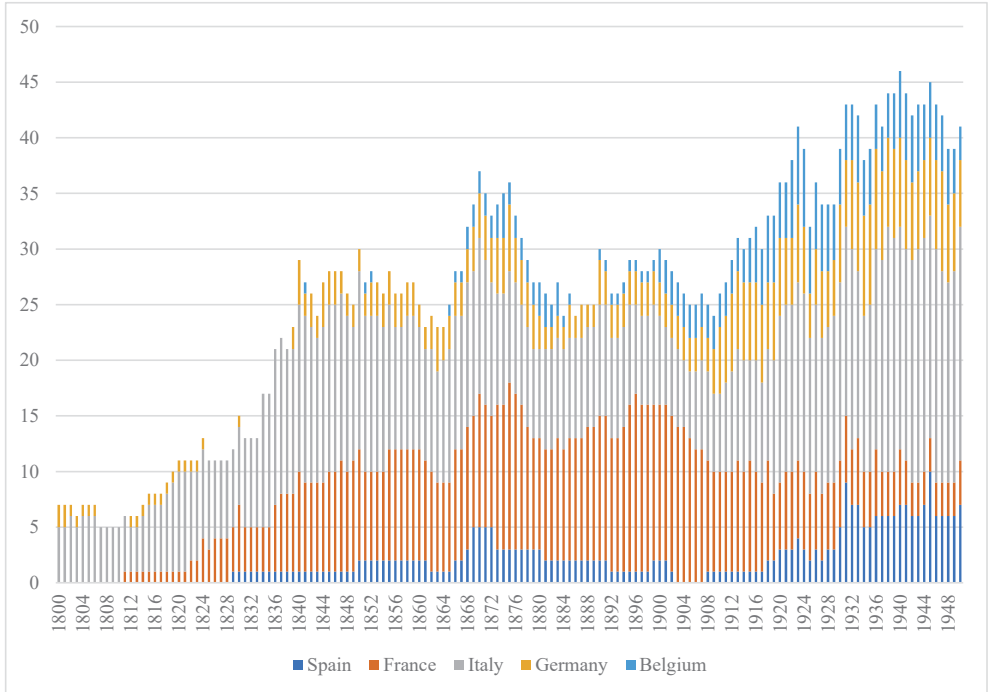


FIGURE 1.2 Total number of people bearing the stigmata per country, 1800–1950. The borders of nations changed dramatically over the course of the period under consideration; those cases of stigmatization in regions that changed hands, such as Apollonia Filzinger near Strasbourg, have been included in the data for the country within today's borders

Marian apparitions) with historical political and economic events during the period and/or place. There is indeed a substantial rise in numbers of politically oriented prophecies and visions in periods and locations of crisis. To the comfortable observer, history accelerates in certain moments, when different developments converge to create historical currents in which people might have felt as if they were being swept away. A timeframe that was felt to be catastrophic or even apocalyptic, then, necessitated widespread sentiment that hope could be found in unlikely places. People blessed with Christ's wounds offered such hope.

The beginning of the nineteenth century is generally considered such a watershed moment: "[A]fter the French Revolution, the Napoleonic wars, the decline of the *Ancien Régime* and the impact of secularisation processes," as Nicole Priesching writes, "many people felt uncertain about the poor state of the world. The decline of the old and an emerging modernity were experienced

by many as catastrophic, as a divine punishment.”⁷⁵ Several scholars of stigmata have, like Priesching, made the same connection between the currents of history and the resurgent “waves” of supernatural phenomena.⁷⁶ Others have chosen to emphasize how stigmatics were embedded in wider cultural tides and have situated them, for example, in the context of a vibrant, religious Romanticism.⁷⁷

Other evolutions also deserve mention in this context, such as the development of the press and mass media, and changes in the public sphere and public opinion. If the supernatural emerges as a more powerful religious and cultural register in times of perceived unease and discomfort, the careful historian must be wary about imposing cultural concepts such as “Romanticism” or “feminisation”⁷⁸ on it. We should also resist the temptation to explain away the ebb and flood of the attraction of stigmata under blanket categories, without taking into account the developments in reporting on these phenomena. This is a matter of hermeneutics: shifts in press and public opinion, for example, have determined our sources. Although some stigmatics explicitly stated (or are *reported* to have stated) that they regarded their stigmatization as supporting Church campaigns against liberalism or “modernity,” or were directly linked to socioeconomic conditions, these conclusions cannot be extended to other stigmatics who did not make such links but who were nonetheless written about in such terms by their contemporaries, or understood in these ways by posterity.

Did these anxieties and developments create the “right” circumstances for a stigmatic and did religious manifestations such as the wounds of Christ tend to emerge above the surface in moments of perceived crisis, or did they emerge because, in these moments, the surface became permeable to signs of divine intervention? In other words, do crises shape a more appreciative atmosphere – a “mood of desperation” – for stigmatics to be recognized and elevated to positions of mystical (and other) authority?⁷⁹ Are the three waves of stigmatics indicative of people who were simply in the right place at the right time, where and when there was an expression of cultural yearning for divine signs, whether apparitions, visions, or stigmata? Or, were they presented as reactive only because polemicists and authorities saw in them powerful

75 Priesching, “Mystikerinnen,” 93.

76 See, e.g. Weiß, “Stigmata,” 117, who also designates the beginning of the nineteenth century as the moment of change because of a Catholic crisis in modernization.

77 On Romanticism and increased interest in/popularity of St Francis, see, e.g. Raab, “Joseph Görres,” 354.

78 Weiß, “Stigmata,” 117.

79 Christian, “Afterword.”

instruments for their campaigns (either positively, against, for example, the liberal nation-state or “secularisation,” or negatively, against, for example, the Church or Catholic nation-states)? Although in many ways these questions may read like a chicken-or-egg issue, it is important to disentangle the different parameters that establish a “stigmatic chronology” if we are to avoid reducing stigmatics to merely signs of the times.

This is not to say that stigmatics did not inhabit roles of scientific, economic or political significance, as we will see, nor that their actions and impact were not informed by their contextual environment. On the contrary, while often confined to their bedroom, many stigmatics nevertheless positioned themselves explicitly *in* the larger outside world. To depict them, therefore, as a reactive phenomenon, and as repositories of meaning in this sense, would be to take a certain kind of “authoritative” source at face value, which often follows a logic of opposition, control and marginalization. In fact, such sources focus precisely on the stigmatic’s pathology or poverty, or frame them within the context of a region’s politics, “superstition” or their relationship with the Church. Such moves towards contextualization in the stigmatic’s time and space are, then, not the invention of social and cultural historians of the past decades; they actually set the tone in many of our scientific, ecclesiastical and civil sources. These sources are the residue of a response: they exist because the stigmatic with which they were concerned posed a perceived mystery, problem or risk. They are, therefore, particularly useful indicators in the study of why stigmatics were singled out or grouped together; however, in the end, they reveal more about the signifier and their preoccupations than about the signified.

The same is true when we look at stigmatic geographies. To speak of a top five “stigmatic countries” is misleading, not only insofar as it is constituted predominantly on the basis of traits that determined whether someone with stigmata was included or excluded, which in turn were influenced by the ulterior motives of those who drew up lists of stigmatics such as Imbert-Gourbeyre. A top five is also problematic because it skirts around issues of locality; first and foremost, in its definition of countries. Nineteenth-century processes of nation-building complicate local and regional sensibilities, especially when following the idea that religious epiphenomena occur predominantly in regions of contestation and borderlands. To take the first chronological wave of stigmatics as an example: is it fair to speak of the many stigmatic women in the Tyrol as an Italian phenomenon, more than 30 years before the conclusion of the Risorgimento? Should some be qualified instead as Austrian?

Second, the top five poses hermeneutical problems because it disavows dynamics between regions within one country, as pointed out, for example, in the

differences between northern and southern Germany. Elke Pahud de Mortanges highlighted this geographical divide through the lens of Enlightenment traditions in the German states, and claimed that in those states where an early formation of a Catholic “environment” took place, “the number of stigmatisations increased.”⁸⁰ In some regions, the harsh light of the Enlightenment cast longer shadows than in others. Whereas in the southern German states and the Tyrol stigmatics were tolerated or even warmly welcomed by local communities and Church authorities, in contrast, as Bernward Schulze points out, in Prussia, with its Protestant and Enlightened traditions (firmly institutionalized by the State), Catholic miracles encountered an organized administrative response, as Anna Katharina Emmerick (1774–1824) discovered at the beginning of the nineteenth century.⁸¹

Subsequently, the binary between rationality and the “hallucinations of mysticism” has provided critics and sceptics with powerful ammunition to paint other regions as superstitious and backward. In a much-cited opinion piece from 1854, Alfred Maury expressed the view that inclinations to epiphenomena were closely intertwined with national mentalities:

In France, the cooling down of beliefs explains how, since the previous century, ecstatic mysticism has become an ever rarer phenomenon; but in those regions where, by contrast, Catholic faith has maintained its fervour, such aberrations still occur in rapid succession. In Bavaria, in the Tyrol, along the banks of the Rhine, Catholic mysticism thrives. The German spirit is predisposed to contemplation and illuminism.⁸²

A third geographical issue is also concerned with dynamics across borders – not between regions but transnationally. Stigmatics who were becoming a public sensation could be transformed into internationally known saintly celebrities, sometimes over the course of a few months; a process aided by the explosion of print reporting and the yellow press. When writing the history of stigmatics, we must bear in mind how different levels of geography are interconnected and how stigmatic reputations (be they saint, celebrity or disgrace) can travel

80 “[...] häufen sich die Stigmatisierungen.” Pahud de Mortanges, “Irre,” 210. Konstanz and Baden versus Prussia and Rhineland.

81 Schulze, “Die ‘angeblich’ stigmatisierte Theresia Winter,” 139–140.

82 “En France, le refroidissement des croyances explique comment, depuis le dernier siècle, le mysticisme extatique devient un phénomène de plus en plus rare; mais dans les contrées au contraire où la foi catholique est restée pleine de ferveur, ces aberrations se produisent encore à des intervalles peu éloignés. En Bavière, dans le Tyrol, sur les bords du Rhin, le mysticisme catholique est très florissant. L’esprit allemande est porté à la contemplation et à l’illuminisme.” Maury, “Des hallucinations,” 475.

from the local to the international level and from countryside to city – and back. Local village phenomena such as Maria Domenica Lazzeri (1815–1848) or Maria von Mörl (1812–1868) gained international fame and, in turn – in what we can consider a case of “trickle-down mysticism” – inspired local emulation in the Tyrol and elsewhere. Throughout this volume, the dynamic between microhistory and transnational history, between cradle and world, is palpable.



Stigmatics were the products of their environment: their time and space. Outsiders understood or framed them in terms of their surroundings, from mental health to economic conditions to political upheaval; from hysteria to Great Depression to *Kulturkampf*. The moment and location of their occurrence, as we have argued, must be thematized by the careful historian of stigmata. However, the circumstances – geographical and chronological – in which someone with stigmata became known and seen as a “stigmatic” must still be addressed in one way or another if we are to redress the balance in favour of the stigmatic and their believers.

To return to the Tyrol, the “holy land” of stigmata in the early nineteenth century: its cluster of stigmatics was taken up by serial publications in German, French and English, but notably not in Italian (as such again undermining the argument for their inclusion in boosting Italy’s place in the top five, a boost arguably not needed to assure the country of its high ranking). Tyrol could best be seen as an independent, religious entity, as Priesching has also argued, characterized by a “movement toward religious renewal” steeped in baroque piety that one could also see in other places with strong regional identities, and that manifested itself – in the case of Tyrol and Bavaria – in the form of clusters of stigmatics.⁸³ However, Tyrol’s status as “holy land” was lost in the Austrian *Kulturkampf*, another indication that its geographical position is defined by its fluidity rather than by its boundaries.

In reconstructing the geographical and chronological circumstances in which stigmatics emerged, we must be careful not to ignore or dismiss the stigmatic’s own agency in the many roles that could be assigned to them. Although bedridden and suffering, they were nonetheless active in shaping and transforming their own image, and made attempts to influence events rather than merely undergoing them, often in the arena of politics or culture war. Stigmatics engaged with the world (and let their voice be heard) by prophesizing the restoration of a monarchy or the outbreak of a war, as did Matarrelli,

83 “Religiöse Erneuerungsbewegung,” Priesching, *Maria von Mörl*, 17. See also Schulze, “Die ‘angeblich’ stigmatisierte Theresia Winter,” 139–140.



FIGURE 1.3 Map of cases of stigmatization reported in present-day Belgium, Germany, Italy, France and Spain (1800–1950)
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or by giving voting advice to devotees, or by taking on the suffering of their local communities when they were swept up by the tidal waves of national or international politics. By doing so, they inadvertently contributed to post-hoc interpretations that explained stigmatics in terms of the crisis with which they associated themselves.

Rather than focus on how the environment can explain the why and how of the frequencies of occurrences of stigmata, we argue that cultural shifts and geographical and chronological specificities may help clarify why stigmatics were problematized in certain places and moments and not in others. To do so, we will shift our attention to the stigmatic and their community and attempt a holistic approach that hopefully shows a “total context,” in which stigmatics can be situated as an integral dimension of the environment, rather than as merely reactive or a by-product. This might complicate previous neat understandings of stigmata – in which, for example, Matarrelli equates with 1871, which equates with the Franco-Prussian War and the Paris Commune – but deepens our understanding of why stigmatics inhabited so powerful and persistent a place in the imagination and devotion of people across Europe. Perhaps most importantly, this approach allows for the excavation of the stigmatic’s voice from under the sediment of discourse and pathology.

Below we propose an open-ended framework for scholarship on stigmata that consists of three historical and analytical categories, and which may help sketch out the chronological and geographical circumstances, thereby

integrating beliefs and practices grounded in experience without minimizing the miraculous and its affectionate intimacy – for the stigmatic and for their community.

- (1) Frames of reference. As already hinted at, stigmata were generally considered to be a “concurring phenomenon,” that is, fitting into broader profiles of supernatural mysticism. Nevertheless, they were singled out as a problematic category and as a devotional attraction in their own right in certain times and places. That did not, however, lead to their bearers being defined as stigmatics by the public, who wielded their own frame of reference in naming the subject of their devotion or curiosity. Stigmatics were variously called “the ecstatic (with the stigmata),” “the prophet,” “the living saint,” “the miracle girl,” and so on. For “stigmatic” to function as a type means that the term corresponded to certain expectations, encouragements and rejections, which may have been shared by some, but were never universal. At any given point, different understandings of “stigmatic” co-existed, directed by emotional, religious, cultural and somatic registers available to people.
- (2) Authority. Such as ecclesiastical opposition/support. As we will discuss in more detail in Chapter 7, the Church always had a suspicious attitude to living stigmatics and mystics. It actively supported the canonized saints (e.g. St Francis), while submitting contemporary cases to the Inquisitional Court and forbidding the publication of the most controversial books dedicated to them (through the tribunal of the *Index* or the denial of *imprimatur* by the bishop). The head of a religious order could put a stop to all promotional efforts to enhance the popularity of a member of his/her order (such as in the case of Padre Pio, for example). Similarly, public authorities also intervened (see Chapters 5, 6 and 7), and the power to intervene and evaluate was challenged by other initiatives.
- (3) Experience, or the question of authenticity. Understood here both as the veracity of the stigmata as something to be tested empirically and scientifically, and as the authentic experience of visiting a stigmatic in person, “authenticity” arose as a modern notion and one which determined not only the medical diagnosis of a stigmatic and verdicts of fraud, but also lay at the core of belief systems and informed sensibilities or public awareness; for example, spikes in media reporting on stigmatics.⁸⁴ (See Chapters 3, 5 and 6).

84 Media landscapes also differed across the countries studied in this volume. On experience as an “interpreted experience” (“gedeutete Erfahrung”), see Priesching, *Maria von Mörl*, 26.

Considered in combination, these analytical categories provide us with a toolbox to study stigmatics. Chronological “waves” and geographical “clusters” are of course thoroughly entangled. More importantly, these categories are themselves unstable: the regional cluster of Tyrolean stigmatics sparked an international wave in the 1830s and 1840s, yet was itself relatively short-lived, being so closely associated with the figures of Maria von Mörl and Maria Domenica Lazzari. They were indeed the reference models for a dozen other alleged young stigmatized women gifted with divine charisms, who lived in the same decade, all within a few square kilometres. Lazzari’s death in 1848 and von Mörl’s retreat into confined living marked the beginning of the end for the “holy land” of stigmata.

In contrast, Palma Matarrelli can best be placed within a wave and within a region only when observing that region for a length of time that includes several upsurges of stigmatics. However, she was not emulated in her time, with her dark character and, above all, the severity of Vatican censorship probably a disincentive for other mystical aspirants to follow her lead, and not incur the same fate. Puglia, unlike the Tyrol, in which there were numerous but chronologically circumscribed cases of stigmatization, is a region in which the phenomenon proliferated for a long time, continuing beyond the life of Palma (see Padre Pio in the twentieth century).⁸⁵ Other centres, such as Rome and Naples, were places with a high intensity of stigmatics, in which the spatio-temporal coordinates were of significance in their perception by contemporaries.

Space and time – the moment and location of a stigmatic manifestation – are not easily untangled; they are interwoven but, as we have shown, both are comprised of different layers, and perhaps it is more meaningful to speak of a *space-time* or “devotional arena” in which expressions of a particular form of religiosity were evoked and enabled that would in other areas be dismissed as inappropriate or unviable.⁸⁶

The framework suggested here is comprised of categories that question and complicate a stigmatic’s chronology and geography – within and beyond the top five stigmatic countries, and within and outside the historicized canon of stigmatics from the Middle Ages to the twenty-first century. It can be used to question lists of archetypical nineteenth and twentieth-century stigmatics as well as the series of historical cases from St Francis of Assisi to Padre Pio; and to delve into issues of legacy, remembrance and ongoing or renewed devotion to certain stigmatics “after the facts” for a range of possible different reasons (see below).

85 See Chapter 7.

86 Seymour, “Emotional arenas.”

“Stigmatic” is therefore a term best used with caution, and also to be read carefully in our sources, where it sometimes seems to have been used to refer to miraculous epiphenomena other than stigmata as such, perhaps because other phenomena were more interesting for the public in a particular place. When Görres wrote to Brentano about Filzinger, for example, he characterized her as “a new stigmatic that does not eat.”⁸⁷ Finally, we must keep in mind that such characterizations and definitions are not the monopoly of the stigmatic chaser, such as Imbert-Gourbeyre, but subject to an interlocked dynamic between stigmatic chasers, the stigmatized and their audience of devotees and sensation seekers. This dynamic itself shifts and changes depending on specific national, regional and temporal cultural contexts.

3 The Invention of “Stigmatics”

3.1 *Defining the Stigmatic*

While exploring some of the cases that have been traced, it became increasingly clear that “stigmatic” was not only used as a general category denoting all individuals who carried the stigmata (visible or invisible) – perhaps among other charismata – but that the term also referred to a specific type of stigmatic – one for whom the stigmata were a most defining feature. The book focuses on this “stigmatic” type, which emerged in the nineteenth century and became stereotypical, although there continued to be a wide variety of people who allegedly carried the wounds of Christ. The stereotypical stigmatic was a young woman bearing the visible wounds of Christ and drawing attention to herself because of the bleeding stigmata.

Before we start exploring the development of this type, we need to recall the caveats concerning our use of the word “stigmatic.” Interestingly, the term did not develop in all of the languages in which our sources were written, or at least not at the same time. We opted for the English word, although it was not frequently used in English-language sources in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁸⁸ Its relative rarity contrasts with the use of the German

87 “[...] es ist wieder eine Stigmatisirte, die nicht isst,” cited in Raab, “Joseph Görres,” 363.

88 We do find it, for example, in the *Catholic Encyclopedia* (Poulain, “Mystical Stigmata”), but we could trace no consensual deployment of the term. Particularly in media sources from the mid-nineteenth century onward, the French “stigmatisée” seems to have been the most common signifier. We thank Kristof Smeyers for pointing to the relative rareness of the word in English sources.

“Stigmati/e/rte,” and Dutch “gestigmatiseerde.”⁸⁹ The term was also adopted in Spanish (“estigmatizada”) and Italian (“stigmatizzato/a”), although these seem to be later creations.⁹⁰

While we agree with Xenia von Tippelskirch that it is important to ask when and where stigmatization is presumed and to examine how the phenomenon is described,⁹¹ our focus is on the stigmatics and what they came to mean to their contemporaries. Like other categorizing words, nouns such as “stigmatisée” or “Stigmatisierte” imply hierarchy (stigmata as the most important feature), exclusion (a subset of “mystics”) and ideology. The meaning shifts and varies, and runs parallel with changes in the definitions of stigmatization and stigmata.

Two examples from German lexicon definitions may help demonstrate what is meant here. In both instances, the description of stigmatics was included in the explanation for the lemma “stigma” and in both cases it was the first time the lexicon included a description of stigma in a religious sense and not just as a reference to its meaning as a branding mark in antiquity. Tellingly, these first instances occur more than twenty years apart.⁹² The *Herder Conversations-Lexikon* already included a reference in its first edition. In 1857, the fifth volume of the lexicon – from a Catholic publishing house – read as follows:

Finally, stigmatization appears historically for the first time with St Francis of Assisi and consists of the imprint of the five wounds of the crucified Saviour. While the Church has up until now only recognized a few cases as real wonders, they have not yet been adequately explained in a natural way, but have ever so often been spurned, in our days they are not even that seldom a fact. It is remarkable that among the stigmatics there are almost solely persons of the female sex, such as, recently,

89 Or a description such as “kruiswonddragende,” Anonymous, *Louisa Lateau of de kruiswonddragende van Bois-d’Haine* (1869).

90 We will discuss this below.

91 Von Tippelskirch, “Ma fille,” 261.

92 On these lexica, see Frevert, “Gefühle definieren,” 16–17. It is interesting to note how Émile Durkheim, the father of sociology, who also initiated the semantic transfer of “stigmatization” from theology to the social sciences, gave importance to the religious element when explaining deviant behaviour, “Imagine a society of saints, a perfect cloister of exemplary individuals. Crimes or deviance, properly so-called, will there be unknown; but faults, which appear venial to the layman, will there create the same scandal that the ordinary offense does in ordinary consciousnesses. If then, this society has the power to judge and punish, it will define these acts as criminal (or deviant) and will treat them as such,” Durkheim, *The Rules*, 68–69.

the nun Anna Katharina Emmerick, the three Tyrolean ecstatic women (Maria v. Mörl, Domenica Lazzari und Crescenz Stinklutsch [sic!]) and Juliana Weiskircher from Ulrichskirchen near Vienna. Of the fact that also in the field of miraculous stigmatization fraud and deceptions exist, Görres provided examples in his *Christian Mysticism*.⁹³

Brockhaus, the other famous German *Conversations-Lexikon*, only included a reference to the religious connotation of “stigma” and stigmatics in 1879, thus years after its first publication in 1809 and after several new editions.⁹⁴ We have already pointed at the importance of the political-historical context in the reception of stigmata, so for now let it suffice to point out that these were the years of the culture wars when reports on stigmatics (and other mystics) were used as political ammunition in discussion between Catholics and their fellow citizens in the still rather young Protestant Bismarckian German nation.⁹⁵

In the Catholic Church, stigmatic refers to those persons on whose bodies the five wounds of Christ appear and bleed from time to time, the most well known are Francis of Assisi and in recent times Katharina Emmerick from Dülmen, Maria von Mörl and especially Louise Lateau [...] Studies have shown that such bleedings can easily be produced in an artificial way.⁹⁶

93 “Als letztere erscheint die S.tisation historisch zuerst beim hl. Franz von Assisi und besteht in der Einprägung der 5 Wundenmale des gekreuzigten Heilandes. Von der Kirche bisher nur in einzelnen Fällen als wirkliches Wunder anerkannt, wurde sie auf natürliche Weise noch nie genügend erklärt aber desto häufiger weggeleugnet, ist jedoch noch in unsern Tagen eine nicht einmal allzu selten vorkommende Thatsache. Beachtenswerth bleibt es, daß unter den S. tisirten sich fast lauter Personen weiblichen Geschlechtes befinden, so neuestens die Nonne Anna Katharina Emmerich, die 3 Tyroler ekstatischen Jungfrauen (Maria v. Mörl, Domenica Lazzari und Crescenz Stinklutsch), dann Juliana Weiskircher von Ulrichskirchen bei Wien. Daß auch im Gebiete der wunderbaren S.tisation Betrügereien und Täuschungen mit unterlaufen können, dafür lieferte Görres in seiner *Mystik Beispiele*.” “Stigma,” *Herders Conversations-Lexikon*, vol. 5, 1857, 338.

94 No references in 1809, 1817 (2), 1818, 1820 (5), 1824 (6), 1827 (7), 1836 (8), 1843–1848 (9), 1851–1855 (10), 1868 (11). The description of the lemma became even more elaborate in the thirteenth edition of 1886, when it included references to neuropathology.

95 The Belgian stigmatic, Louise Lateau, for example, became a symbolic figure. See Van Osselaer, “Stigmata.”

96 “In der katholischen Kirche werden als Stigmatisirte solche Personen bezeichnet, an deren Leibe sich die fünf Wundmale Christi zeigen und zeitweilig bluten sollen; am bekanntesten sind Franz von Assisi und in der neuen Zeit Katharina Emmerich zu Dülmen, Maria von Mörl und insbesondere Luise Lateau [...] Forschungen haben ergeben, daß derartige Blutungen sehr leicht auf künstlichem Wege erzeugt werden können [...]” “Stigma,” *Conversations-Lexikon*, vol. 14, 1879, 125.

There were some similarities in the descriptions given by the two lexica: both referred to the visible stigmata that were an imitation of Christ's wounds (and thus ignored the invisible, or figurative stigmata), and they both mention St Francis and contemporary examples, indicating that it was not solely a phenomenon of the past. In fact, it was "not even that rare a fact" ("eine nicht einmal allzu selten vorkommende Thatsache"). Both texts cautioned against frauds (due to the emphasis on the physical wounds) and mentioned the Catholic Church, suggesting that the phenomenon was Catholic. In both lexica, the descriptions became more elaborate over the years: a later edition of the *Brockhaus Lexikon* (13th edition, 1886), included a few extra lines on the pathological nature of the stigmata in some of the cases.⁹⁷ The German definitions were similar to what we find in Dutch and French sources from the mid and late nineteenth century. All refer to the visible wounds and to the same examples.⁹⁸

So, why do we refer to general lexica and dictionaries here, rather than, for example, Catholic encyclopaedia and theological treatises of the time? The descriptions in the specialized publications are more complex and nuanced and include, for example, historical overviews, different types and interpretations of the phenomenon. What interests us here, however, is whether non-experts were using the word (and they did) and what they were referring to when they used "Stigmatisierte," "stigmatisée" or a similar word. As the examples in the lexica show, they were predominantly referring to women who exhibited the visible wounds: Anna Katherina Emmerick (1774–1824, Dülmen), Maria von Mörl (1812–1868, Kaltern), Maria Domenica Lazzeri (1815–1848, Capriana), Krescenzia Niglutsch (1816–1855, Tschermers),⁹⁹ Juliana Weiskircher (1824–1862, Ulrichskirch-Schleinbach) and Louise Lateau (1850–1883, Bois-d'Haine). They were all young women who displayed the physical wounds, drew public attention and received many visitors in their homes as a result. This summary description comprises two important changes that took place in the nineteenth

97 For this medical interest, see Chapter 4. The Herder edition of 1907 included a more complex description of the wounds and differentiated between the invisible and the visible ones (in all their diversity), adding other corporeal phenomena that were linked to stigmatics, and while there are references to the same stigmatics, such as Emmerick, there is mention of more than 300 stigmatics, "Stigmatisation," *Herders Konversation Lexikon*, vol. 8, 1907, c.165–166.

98 "Stigma," *Winkler Prins*, vol. 13, 1880, 382; "Stigmatisé, ée," *Dictionnaire de la langue Française*, vol. 4: Q–Z, 1873, 2046.

99 The historians are not unanimous about the village of her birth: Tschermers, Lana, Cana, San Leonardo in Passiria. On this topic, see Ludovico Maria Gadaleta, "Rosmini e l'Addolorata di Capriana," *Rivista Rosminiana di filosofia e di cultura*, 108 (2014), 2–3, 79–149, 102–103.

century: (1) a change in the profile of stigmatics and, in parallel with this, but not completely identical, (2) the development of a new type of mystic.

In her work on the visitors to modern stigmatics, Paula Kane has noted how the majority of the cases that drew most public attention involved lay women and took place outside the convent walls. "Hence, what had flourished since the Middle Ages among nuns and sisters as a personal mystical experience in a cloistered setting, was suddenly exposed to the public gaze, and even sought out by the public."¹⁰⁰ Although stigmatization was not a gender-exclusive phenomenon, the number of female stigmatics rose significantly in the nineteenth century.¹⁰¹

Nicole Priesching considers that the rise of this type of young female stigmatic occurred in the context of the development of a new type of female mystic, the "ecstatic woman" ("ekstatische Jungfrau"), in the nineteenth century. Although cases of mystical ecstatic women with stigmata have been reported from the Middle Ages and early modern period, this trend became predominant in late modernity. One of the characteristics of this new type was the importance of the corporeal aspects, such as ecstasy: "it was primarily because of these epiphenomena that their environment identified them as mystics."¹⁰² While these women were heirs of older traditions of Passion and bridal mysticism,¹⁰³ the corporeal was more important than the intellectual and these women were most often not the authors of spiritual texts. Many of them had their first mystical experiences in puberty (often demonic attacks). The semi-hagiographic narratives on these mystics presented them as exemplary of the three main virtues of single women: humbleness, chastity and obedience. Often the idealization of these virtues seems to have been translated into specific corporeal practices, such as fasting, self-flagellation and specific prayer positions. Those who failed to live up to one of the virtues (e.g. obedience) could be disregarded altogether. Priesching notes that while these women came from various social backgrounds, they often had a difficult childhood (accidents and illnesses; deaths in the family), which confirmed their victim role.¹⁰⁴

Elke Pahud de Mortanges created a similar list of characteristics of stigmatized women from the nineteenth century. Commenting on the corporeal

100 Kane, "Stigmatic Cults," 106. She refers thereby to the work of Herbert Thurston, *Surprising Mystics*, 167.

101 Pahud de Mortanges, "Fromm," 159.

102 "Es gehört aber zum Typus dieser Jungfrauen, dass ihre Umwelt sie vor allem über diese Begleiterscheinungen als Mystikerinnen identifizierte," Priesching, "Mystikerinnen," 81.

103 See Chapter 3.

104 "Demut, Keuschheit und Gehorsam," Priesching, "Mystikerinnen," 95–97.

aspect she notes how bearing the wounds was not the only exceptional phenomenon that was reported: the ability to go without food (or survive on only a little) was also reported for several of them. She sees two models of stigmatics: on the one hand, there were women who “merely” displayed the stigmata (either constantly or at specific moments) and, on the other hand, there were women who also had visions and uttered prophecies and therefore functioned as a sort of medium delivering messages.¹⁰⁵ Two aspects touched upon by Pahud de Mortanges should be mentioned here, although we will treat them more elaborately in the following chapters. Firstly, the important role that male protectors played in the lives of these women cannot be overestimated: “They contributed to their popularization and publicity, but they also held, as individuals or as ‘pressure group’, a protective hand over them.”¹⁰⁶ Secondly, these women were familiar with the stories and representations of older cases of stigmatization.¹⁰⁷

As noted, the descriptions in the general dictionaries and lexica suggest that it was this type of stigmatic that contemporaries were thinking about when they talked about them. This might have something to do with their relative visibility in comparison with other types. Contrary to stigmatized cloistered nuns, for example, news about the stigmatization of a young laywoman was far more difficult to contain. Once word got out, it was almost impossible to stop devotees, the curious and sceptics from travelling to see these women for themselves. Newspaper articles and other publications document this interest. In some cases, the interest developed into a mass phenomenon.¹⁰⁸ Joachim Boufflet refers to this as a change in the socio-ecclesiastical status of the stigmatic: because of new developments in the means of communication and transport, it became much easier to go and see the phenomenon. He mentions Anna Katharina Emmerick as one of the earliest examples,¹⁰⁹ who, as noted above, also featured in the lexica and dictionaries as a prototypical stigmatic, receiving the wounds in 1812.

105 Pahud de Mortanges, “Fromm,” 162; and Pahud de Mortanges, “Irre,” 209.

106 “Sie trugen zur Popularisierung und Publizität bei, sie hielten aber auch als Einzelne oder als ‘pressure group’ schützend die Hand über sie.” Pahud de Mortanges, “Fromm,” 166. For this aspect, see Chapter 5 on material culture.

107 Pahud de Mortanges, “Fromm,” 165.

108 Pahud de Mortanges, “Irre,” 209. See also the work of Rudolf Muhs on Karoline Beller (1833–1863), a stigmatic in Prussian Westphalia in 1845, who drew the attention of more than 20,000 people, not just Westphalians, but also from Hessen, Braunschweig, Hannover and Thüringen, Muhs, “Die Stigmata,” 127.

109 Boufflet, *Les stigmatisés*, 90. For a similar view, see Klaniczay, “Louise Lateau,” 291.

However, as both Otto Weiß and Paula Kane have noted, the attention she drew was relatively limited and not really a mass mobilization. She triggered the interest of many people (lay and religious) when the news of her stigmatization first became public, but after the episcopal authorities intervened only a few visitors were allowed to see her. The majority of them belonged to elite circles, for whom it was almost fashionable to have visited the nun from Dülmen.¹¹⁰ While the stigmatic from Westphalia (Germany) certainly fits the type, and was mentioned among the examples in the lexica, it was a series of other cases of stigmatization that had a catalysing effect and inspired imitation. The group of Tyrolean stigmatics and ecstasies,¹¹¹ the “crusade of the delighted” (“Kreuzzug der Verzückten”), as one contemporary called it,¹¹² was not just a local phenomenon, as the names of Maria Domenica Lazzeri and Maria von Mörl became known throughout Europe. The number of people who wanted to see them was impressive. According to the German writer Joseph von Görres: “From the end of the month of July [1833] up until 15 September of that year probably 40,000 people, or more, from all classes, thronged around her.”¹¹³ Joseph von Görres had a particular interest in stigmatics. His work, *Die christliche Mystik* (1836–1842), was one of the early nineteenth-century examples of a more extensive study of stigmatization.¹¹⁴ According to Bernhard Gißibl, it was Görres writing about Maria von Mörl and his visit to her in 1835 that stimulated

110 “fast zum guten Ton gehörte” Weiß, “Seherinnen,” 60; Kane, “Stigmatic Cults,” 120–121.

111 These nouns are used interchangeably, we will discuss this below. Weiß, “Seherinnen,” 63, mentions ten ecstasies and stigmatics in South Tyrol and cites Höcht, who even claims there were about 110 “Leidenspersonen.” See Priesching (2007) for sources on these women; and Priesching *Maria von Mörl*, 92. The series included Hieronyma Stroble (Kalter), Ursula Mohr (Eppan), Schusterkind von Jenesien, Theresia Steiner (Taisten im Pustertal, 1813–862), and the already mentioned Maria Domenica Lazzeri, Maria von Mörl and Krescenzia Niglutsch.

112 A quotation of the Tyrolean Benedictine Beda Weber, cited in Priesching, *Maria von Mörl*, 92.

113 “Mit Kreuz und Fahnen machten sich ... die Gemeinden nacheinander auf und wallfahrteten nach Kaldern, und der Zulauf wurde ungeheuer. Vom Ende des Monats Julius [1833] bis zum 15. September jenes Jahres mögen wohl 40.000 Menschen, und darüber, aus allen Ständen sich zu ihr gedrängt haben.” (“With cross and flags the communities mobilized one after another and made a pilgrimage to Kaldern, the turnout became uncanny.”) Görres, *Die Christliche Mystik*, 500.

114 Joseph von Görres (1776–1848) mentioned, among others, Anna Katherina Emmerick. According to Weiß, stigmata were, for Görres, the “externalisation of the inner outmost participation of the soul in the suffering of Christ.” “So sind denn auch die Stigmata für Görres die ‘Verausserlichung’ der inneren ‘übergrosse Teilnahme’ der Seele am Leiden des Erlösers,” Weiß, “Seherinnen,” 66. On Görres, see Sbalchiero, *Dictionnaire*, 322–324.

interest in her.¹¹⁵ Maria was not the first stigmatic that Joseph von Görres had met. Ten years earlier, in 1825, he had visited Apollonia Filzinger in Homerting (near Saverne, 1801–1827, stigmata 1824). His travel companion on both trips, the romantic poet Clemens Brentano (1778–1842), was not unfamiliar with the phenomenon of stigmatization either, for he had spent five years at the bedside of that other famous stigmatic, Anna Katherina Emmerick, and would later publish her visions.¹¹⁶ The visit to Maria von Mörl in Kaltern in 1835 seems to have left a good impression on Joseph von Görres and he included an extensive description of her in his book on Christian mysticism. It is important to consider what Nicole Priesching has noted on this study and Maria von Mörl's role in it. She remarked that since there had been precursors of ecstatic and stigmatized women in the Catholic tradition, and the number seemed to be on the rise again in the nineteenth century, there was probably a shared knowledge of the basic type (*Grundtypus*) of "ecstatic woman," who could display a certain diversity of phenomena. Görres' work, *Die christliche Mystik*, listing different cases throughout the centuries, attempted to integrate this diversity into a typological system. Maria von Mörl was the living realization of this system for the onlooker. The way she performed her "role" was defining for her contemporaries' view of the "ecstatic woman," and became more so the longer she received social recognition. The way Maria von Mörl (and her father confessor) behaved while she had visitors, influenced their perception of what a "real" stigmatic was.¹¹⁷

In relation to the series of ecstatic stigmatized women reported in Bavaria in the late 1830s, it seems to have been the Tyrolean wave – and Maria von Mörl in particular – that inspired these imitations.¹¹⁸ The Tyrolean stigmatics were obviously not very distant (in time or geographically) from their Bavarian

115 On the role of Görres's work for the reputation of von Mörl, see Gißibl, *Frömmigkeit*, 52. He refers to Binder, "Maria von Mörl," 450.

116 Engling, *Die Wende*, 56, 96. It was Brentano who urged his friend Joseph von Görres to write his *Die Christliche Mystik* and study stigmatization more thoroughly, Raab, "Joseph Görres," 365. Görres first response was a study of St Francis, "Der Heilige Franziskus von Assisi, ein Troubadour," in *Der Katholik*, 20 (1826), 14–55. Brentano himself saw a link between the two stigmatics. As Clemens Brentano wrote to his brother, 15 March 1826, the twenty-year-old orphan Filzinger, received the wounds during Lent 1824, thus shortly after the death of Anna Katharina Emmerick. Cited in Engling, *Die Wende*, 56.

117 Priesching, *Maria von Mörl*, 407 and 273 (on the institutionalization of Maria von Mörl as a process of typification [Typisierungsprozess] cfr. Berger/Luckmann).

118 Bernhard Gißibl has shown how there was a series of ecstatic women in Bavaria in the late 1830s who explicitly referred to Maria von Mörl as an example, Gißibl, *Frömmigkeit*, 57. See also Priesching, "Mystikerinnen," 83.

fellow mystics, and this helps to explain why they functioned as examples. However, we should probably not underestimate the international media attention they also received and the publications they inspired; for example, Antonio Riccardi's *Le tre mirabili vergini* (1836)¹¹⁹ and Leon Boré's *Les stigmatisées du Tyrol* (1843).

Whether inspired by Emmerick or the Tyrolean cases or not, in the following years we find new reports of such stigmatics,¹²⁰ referred to as "the stigmatic of" Lütgeneder (Karoline Beller, 1845),¹²¹ of Gendringen (Dorothea Visser, 1844),¹²² and of Wolpertswende (Viktoria Hecht, 1869).¹²³ It was a long-lasting legacy, with one of the most famous examples, the stigmatic of Konnersreuth (Therese Neumann, 1926), living nearly 80 years later.¹²⁴

The fact that it was this type of stigmatic – the young woman displaying visible wounds and visited by many – that caught widespread attention and came to be synonymous with the term "stigmatic," can be linked to greater public knowledge of the type. Some visitors might have seen other stigmatics or read about them in the newspapers. In other words, because of the publicity given to the type, it became increasingly well known and recognizable. Consequently, what William A. Christian has noted with regard to the reception of Marian apparitions, holds true for the cases of stigmatization as well. Cases that resembled others might have a better chance of surviving the first reception phase of sceptical family members, friends and villagers if they exhibited similar characteristics known from other cases.¹²⁵

119 The first version of "Le tre mirabili vergini" was probably published in the Catholic journal, *Cattolico Giornale religioso-letterario*, 9 (15 November 1836), vol. 2, 193–213.

120 See also the example of Walburga Zentner, from Waalhaupten, who claimed to be stigmatized in 1830 and easily fit the profile, as the following description of her illustrates (she never became well-known): "a single woman [...] who displayed the five wounds of the Saviour on her body via periodically bleeding cuts" to whose house "the people of the area started to go to" ("eine ledige Weibsperson [...], welche an ihrem Körper die fünf Wunde Male des Heilandes durch periodisch blutende Einschnitte darstelle, und das die Bewohner der Gegend anfangen nach ihren Wohnorte zu wandern"), Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv (BayHStA), MK 719, religiöse Schwarmerei der Walburga Zentner, letter to king by "königliche General, Kommissär und Regierungs Präsidenten," 24 October 1830.

121 Anonymous, *Kurze Nachricht über die Stigmatisierte zu Lütgeneder* (1845).

122 From the Netherlands, but she also drew attention in Germany. Welscher, [J.B.] te, *Die Stigmatisierte zu Gendringen. Nach genauen Beobachtungen herausgegeben* (1844).

123 Rauch, *Die Stigmatisierte von Wolpertswende* (1907).

124 Wunderle, *Die Stigmatisierte von Konnersreuth: Tatsachen, Eindrücke, Erwägungen* (1927).

125 Christian, "Afterword." See also Nicole Priesching on the expectations (built up through own experiences or communications by others, e.g. the Church) of the visitors confirmed, modified or disappointed during the visit. Priesching, *Maria von Mörl*, 21.

However, caution should prevail. Firstly, we should not overemphasize the novelty of the type. There are examples of women with the visible stigmata who drew the attention of visitors in previous eras as well. What changed – as we will see – seems to have been the meaning attached to the stigmata, their status so to speak, and the ideals of femininity linked to physical and emotional suffering. Secondly, as noted in the discussion of Imbert-Gourbeyre’s work and other lists, the interpretation of the stigmatic could be much broader. Imbert-Gourbeyre attempted to find as many stigmatics (different types) as he could and therefore his list of “stigmatisées” had a different logic from that of Leon Boré, who described a specific wave and a specific type.¹²⁶ For both authors, however, having the stigmata was the defining feature. Thirdly, the emergence of the type of stigmatic described in the dictionaries and lexica did not exclude the existence of other types. In fact, other types – such as the invisibly stigmatized women religious, or the charismatic, prophetic leader – continued to be reported, yet they seem not to have drawn so much attention, or the stigmata did not feature as prominently in their profiles. The continuation of other types is apparent in Fig. 1.4, where we chart the “stigmatic” type against the total number of cases of stigmatization that we could trace in the period under investigation. We selected those individuals who fit the “stigmatic” type. This offered us the opportunity to see whether the absence of the word reflected a different stigmatic landscape in Spain and Italy. The chart shows that the “stigmatic” type did not represent the majority of cases (8 out of 22 in Belgium, 19 out of 46 in Germany, 7 out of 31 in Spain, 17 out of 59 in France, and 29 out of 87 in Italy).¹²⁷

This brings us to another point of caution, we must also reflect on the use of the word “stigmatic” in the sources that we study. The use of “Stigmatisierte,” “stigmatisée” and “gestigmatiseerde” seems to confirm the importance attached to the wounds during the nineteenth century; however, it did not eclipse the use of other words to denote these women. The Spanish and Italian examples seem to suggest that there was no “need” for a more specific word singling out those who had the stigmata – or at least not in the first half of the nineteenth century. Nonetheless, the moment the words start appearing in the Spanish sources, the texts refer to “stereotypical” stigmatics: Louise Lateau (“estigmatizada”) and the German Therese Neumann (in the 1930s, when the word was

126 Although there was diversity as well. For differences between Maria von Mörl and Maria Domenica Lazzeri, see Schubach, “Visiting.”

127 We address this in “Different countries/Different stigmatics”, p. 41. and “Building blocks”, p. 46.

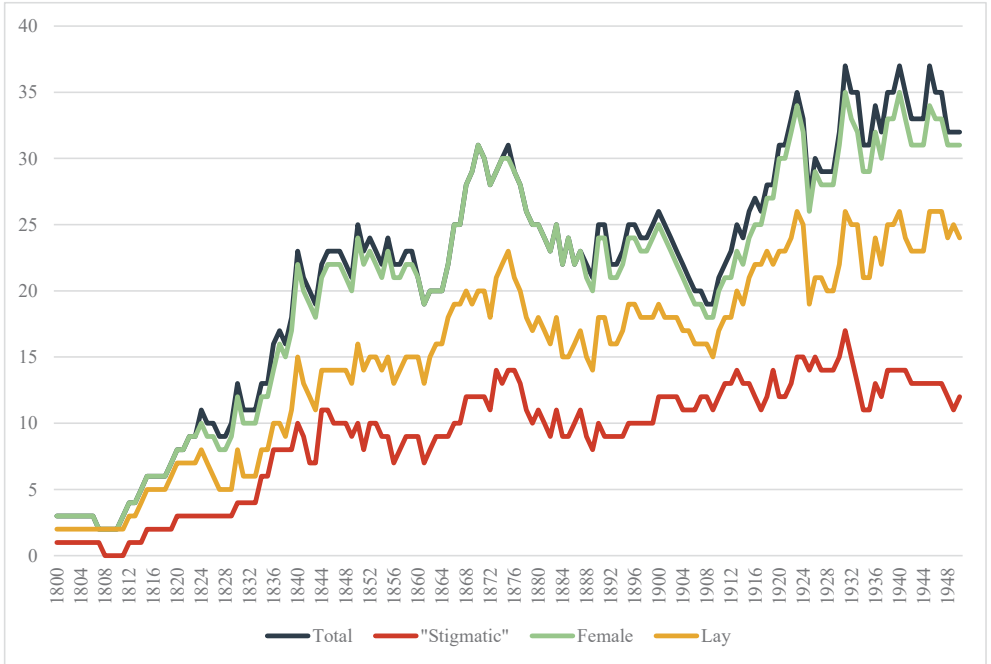


FIGURE 1.4 The “stigmatic” relative to the total number of stigmata cases and to its main selection criteria (in the five countries under consideration), 1800–1950

used more frequently).¹²⁸ Similarly, the Italian word “stigmatizzata” was used in book titles on Louise Lateau¹²⁹ and for publications on Therese Neumann. Thus in both cases the development of the word seems to have been linked to the popularity of two stigmatics from abroad (Belgium and Germany) whose mediatised fame travelled across their national borders to Spain and Italy.

In summary, “stigmatic” seems to have developed into an organizing categorization and a specific type in the nineteenth century. In books such as

128 A search in press digital databases, such as that in the Biblioteca Nacional de España, shows that the word “estigmatizada” (as a noun equivalent to “stigmatic”) appears in articles about Louise Lateau from the 1870s, but not in relation to previous famous cases, such as Sor Patrocinio, where “estigmatizada” is used as an adjective “stigmatized.” See e.g. “La célebre estigmatizada belga Luisa Lateau,” *El Criterio Médico*, December 10, 1875, 552; “Tribunales del Reino,” *Gaceta de los tribunales*, April 14, 1841, 162–164. “Estigmatizada” as a noun is commonly used in articles referring to Neumann from 1928 onwards, and appears in contemporary publications that mention a few Spanish stigmatics, such as María Luisa Zancajo (1911–1954). See e.g. W.K. Jaschke, “La estigmatizada de Konnersreuth,” *La Luz del Porvenir*, April (1928): 116–117; Callejo and Iniesta, *Testigos del prodigio*.

129 Van Looy, *Luisa Lateau la stigmatizzata di Bois-d’Haine* (1876). A translation of the original French.

Görres' *Die christliche Mystik* and Imbert-Gourbeyre's *Les stigmatisées*, mystics are grouped together precisely because they bore the stigmata (even if it was not their most important characteristic) – which Xenia von Tippelskirch refers to as a reinvention of stigmatization. The number of stigmatics was on the rise in the nineteenth century and what we see in dictionaries and titles of publications is that a specific type of stigmatic, the young women displaying physical wounds and attracting visitors, became the stereotypical stigmatic – the figure that people thought of when they heard the term, and that Boré and others listed in their books.

3.2 *Stigmatic: An Unstable Category*

Not all people who had the holy wounds were in fact called stigmatics. In our five countries, the concept seems widespread in France, Germany and Belgium, but the Italian and Spanish contexts seem quite different. Moreover, other terminology continued to be used in each country. Nineteenth-century stigmatics were also called “miracle girl” (“Wundermädchen,” “mirabile vergine”),¹³⁰ “ecstatic” (“Ekstatikerin”),¹³¹ “sufferer” (“Addolorata,” “Dulderin”),¹³² “atoning

130 The term was used, for example, in reports on fasting girls in the sixteenth century (e.g. Margaretha Weiss). We find the term throughout our period, from the late eighteenth up to the early twentieth century. Anna Katharina Emmerich is compared to the miracle girl from Osnabrück, Anne Marie Kinker (1783–1812, 1798). See also the description of Maria Gertrud Galles (1852) and the ultimate “miracle girl,” Therese Neumann. Alternative versions are the French description “living miracle” (“miracle vivant”), “miracle girl” (English: 1860s: on Louise Lateau). Landesarchiv Nordrhein Westfalen- Abteilung Westfalen (LAV NRW), Regierung Münster, nr. 17709, Die Wundergeschichte der stigmatisierten ehemalige Chorschwester Emmerich zu Dülmen, 24 January 1817: letter from the Ministerium des Innern, Münster. Archiv Erzbistum Köln (AEK), Generalia I. 31. Religiöse Umtriebe und Missbräuche, 31.6.1. Sog. Wunderbare Erscheinungen, Frömmelien etc. (1852–1935), “Verhandlungen betreffend die angeblich stigmatisierte Maria Gertrud Galles zu Giesenkirchen und den Vikar Schrammen derselbst” Kirchenvorstand of Giesenkirchen, 9 May 1852 to Archbishop Johannes von Geissel; O.T., “Vorgängerinnen des Wundermädchens von Konnersreuth: Stigmatisierungen im vorigen Jahrhundert,” *Deutsche Tageszeitung* (Berlin), Nr. 437, 16/09/1927.

131 In the Tyrolean series, “ecstatic” and “stigmatic” seem to have been used interchangeably, at least in the northern European literature. As Nicole Priesching has noted, stigmata were regarded as the next step after a mystical phenomenon (ecstasy as the experience of God) that in itself was puzzling enough to draw people’s attention. The designation “ecstatic” did not disappear the moment the stigmata developed, Priesching, *Maria von Mörl*, 93.

132 The German words “Leiderin” and “Dulderin,” and the Italian “Paziente” and “Addolorata” refer to the women who patiently accepted and suffered through the pain and hardships God had been willing to send them. Within a religious setting, the term could also be used for women who did not carry the wounds of Christ but suffered from inner pains (e.g. the

soul” (“Sühneseele”),¹³³ or “living saints,” “saintly virgin” (“santa viva,” “sainte vierge”), “divinely blessed” (“Gottbegnadete”), or were included in the ranks of the “mystics” (“Mystikerin,” “mystieke”) or related nouns, such as “visionary” (“Seherin,” “visionnaire,” “visionaria”).

Must we assume that the different vocabulary used to refer to the alleged bearers of the Lord’s wounds means that there were different types of stigmatics? The answer is complex. On the one hand, we can see that there were different types and categories of stigmatics. The differences lay in their social status (male or female, secular or religious, virgin or married, public or anonymous figure, alleged saint or fraud) or the form of their stigmata (visible, invisible, imitative, etc.). On the other hand, the same subjects could be defined differently in different contexts. By “context,” we not only mean the geographical and chronological framework, but the connotations of a specific community or social group. The example of Palma Matarrelli may help to explain this point.

The French doctor Antoine Imbert-Gourbeyre thought of her as “the most extraordinary woman of our age.”¹³⁴ He saw in her stigmata – even more than in the other religious epiphenomena such as ecstasy, inedia, demonic attacks – similarities with the other stigmatic he had studied, Louise Lateau. Therefore, for the French doctor, the wounds were the primary point of interest, and this explains his description of Palma as a stigmatic. For the latter’s confessors, however, the point of reference was different. Palma bore the wounds of Christ, but rather than speak of *alter Christus* (e.g. as the biographer of St Francis did), they preferred to refer to her as “Veronica, true image of Christ.”¹³⁵

In contrast to Imbert-Gourbeyre, for Matarrelli’s confessors, her stigmata were only one part of her religious persona. For the regional clergy, that is for

invisible stigmata) or illnesses in the belief that it was God’s will and their pain had meaning. Ana Nasl, for example, was called “Dulderin” and “Eine Sühneseele im Geiste der heiligen Theresia vom Kinde Jesu,” Bayerische Staatsbibliothek München (BSB), Nachlass Lama, Friedrich von (1876–1944), Ana 445, file 2.

133 In the case of the stigmatics, the words linked to pain and suffering also refer to the Christian teachings on atonement. Stigmatics are described as “Sühneseele,” “Opferseele,” “anima” or “vittima sacrificale” (sacrificial or victim souls). These nouns hint at the sacrifices the women made to appease the anger of God, and to atone for the sins committed by their fellow human beings.

134 “la femme la plus extraordinaire de notre époque.” Imbert-Gourbeyre, *Les Stigmatisées, II, Palma d’Oria*, 3.

135 ACDF, C.L. 1875, *Les Stigmatisées par le Docteur A. Imbert-Gourbeyre*, f. 4r. In three volumes of manuscripts, Father Vincenzo de Angelis collected the virtues, prodigies, and the steps taken by the mystic Palma-Veronica, ending with the “perfect mystical union with the divine.” The Holy Office became aware of the Matarrelli case because of De Angelis. He sent his manuscript to the Vatican Index Congregation hoping to obtain the *imprimatur* for the publication. ACDF, *Censurae Librorum*, 1875, P. II CL 1875 5 vol II.

the clergymen who did not have a direct relationship with her but who were constantly informed by her confessors, she was famous as the “Estatica’ d’Oria,” an epithet that was also attributed to Maria von Mörl.¹³⁶ For these clergymen, the term “ecstatic” referred to a whole series of supernatural prodigies. For the faithful and the community members of Matarrelli’s village, she was simply “La Beata Palma” (the Blessed Palma), even if she was still alive and could therefore – according to canon law – not be blessed and had in any case not received any approval from the Vatican authorities. The people worshipped Matarrelli for her alleged miraculous abilities, and saw in her stigmata the visible confirmation of her sanctity, but the wounds did not monopolize their attention. In the 1870s, Matarrelli became famous in the international press for her prophecies. *L’Univers* of 17 March 1872 reported on the “voix prophétiques” of the “voyante d’Oria.”¹³⁷ Whether she had stigmata or not, was not so important for the media. What counted were her apocalyptic visions concerning the death of Emperor Napoleon III, famines and pestilences in Italy, Spain and France, and the exile of the pope from Rome. Ultimately, in the papers kept in the Archives of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith (the modern name for the former Holy Office and former Roman Inquisition), Palma has been catalogued as a false saint, guilty of the crime of “affettata santità” (“simulated holiness”).¹³⁸

So, who was Matarrelli? A stigmatic, a mystic, an ecstatic, blessed, an important citizen, a prophetess, a false saint? Basically, she was all of these. The bearers of the holy wounds were not “specialized” solely in stigmata. They were in fact endowed with a series of other charisms (such as ecstasies, prophetic and thaumaturgical powers, levitation, bilocation, polyglossia), had mystical conversations (with Christ, the Virgin Mary, saints, souls in purgatory), were continually tempted by the devil, and could not eat (inedia) or sleep for years.¹³⁹

The lack of “specialization” in stigmata helps to explain why there were alternative names with which “stigmatics” such as Matarrelli could be labelled. However, it does not explain why the term was not used in Spain or Italy as it was in the other countries (where alternative options also existed). In this regard, we want to suggest three hypotheses about the late development and limited use of the word, which might be linked to: 1) the difference in the typology

136 ACDF, C.L. 1875 5, ff. 39 r–41 v. Letter from Francesco priest of Ostuni to Cardinal Lavalletta, 25/05/1872.

137 Imbert-Gourbeyre, *Les Stigmatisées, II*, 30–31, 84–93.

138 ACDF, C.L. 1875, 5, ff. 71 v and 81 v.

139 Similar to Palma d’Oria, Maria Domenica Lazzari was associated with a long list of supernatural phenomena and many epithets (Maria Domenica was called: “L’Addolorata di Capriana,” virgin, ecstatic, suffering patient, “La Meneghina,” “santarella,” etc).

of stigmatics reported in the different countries; 2) the influence of religious authority; 3) a negative connotation to the word in Italy and Spain.

3.2.1 Different Countries/Different Stigmatics?

Can the difference in the terms used in Italy and Spain be explained by the difference in the type of stigmatics that were reported there? What, if any, were the substantial differences between the cases reported in the five countries? The first noticeable difference is the proportions of lay and religious stigmatics. While in Belgium (19 cases out of 22 in total, 17 women) and Germany (40 out of 46, 38 women) the prevalence of lay stigmatics is clear, in Spain the numbers are equal (15 lay and 16 religious, all women). In Italy (53 lay of 87 in total, 51 women) and France (36 lay of 59 in total, all women) there is a small lay majority. However, there seem to be more similarities than differences between the countries. For example, the common trend was that the majority of stigmatics were women (95.5% of cases¹⁴⁰), who also had other charisms, had achieved *fama sanctitatis* especially in the local context (village or small community), and showed visible signs of the Passion.

Moreover, it is important to note that even in Spain and Italy stigmatics that would be defined as “stereotypical” for this period could also be found. There is, however, a difference in chronology. In Spain, the stereotypical stigmatics were primarily reported in the first decades of the twentieth century (1918–1945). The start of the twentieth century was a blooming period in Italy, too, but there we also find reports from the nineteenth century (e.g. Lazzeri and Matarrelli). Furthermore, Italian and Spanish stigmatics were also included in the lists compiled by Görres and Imbert-Gourbeyre.

So, if Palma Matarrelli and Maria Domenica Lazzeri were “stigmatisées” in the eyes of Antoine Imbert-Gourbeyre and Léon Boré, why did their followers not call them “stigmatizzata”? It can be argued that, if the mystic bearers had the same characteristics throughout the continent, what differentiated them was the interpretative lens, moral values and presuppositions and judgements with which their contemporaries perceived them, as well as the different social-cultural-religious environments.

3.2.2 Religious Conditioning: The Taboo of Stigmata

In the countries under discussion, Church and State were separate but there were major differences in the histories and impact of these divisions. For example, the Kingdom of Italy was founded in 1861 and Rome became the official capital in 1871, while Catholicism was officially declared the only State religion

140 In two cases the gender of the stigmatic could not be defined.

as late as 1939.¹⁴¹ A completely different situation characterized France, where the relationship between the civil and religious authorities was clarified in 1790 with the Civil Constitution of the Clergy. With regard to the Church's policy of social control in the southern states, we can see a significant difference. Throughout Europe, bishops were called to intervene in their dioceses if there were religious problems. In some countries, for example Germany and Belgium, public authorities also intervened. In southern Europe, however, it was very rare that the civil authorities became involved in such matters. In Spain and Italy, for centuries local inquisitorial tribunals had regulated the behaviour of the faithful in various matters in several cities.¹⁴² Especially in Italy, the clergy and the Roman Inquisition claimed superior competence. In Spain, even if the inquisition was closely linked with the royal court, clergymen dealt with "beatas" ("living saints")¹⁴³ suspected of "santidad fingida" (pretense of holiness).¹⁴⁴ In other countries, however, civil law, science and the debate in the media had the same level of importance and equal authority to state opinions on the issue.

Moreover, as addressed in more detail in Chapter 7, on the Vatican response, stigmata were considered by the Church to be the wounds impressed on Christ's body which, over the centuries, had been shared by only a limited number of saints (e.g. St Francis and St Catherine). The Vatican clergymen seldom accepted them as "real" and only if they fulfilled specific criteria. Firstly, knowledge of the wounds could not be widespread during the life of the bearers. The divine gift was regarded as *gratia gratis data* and as the last step on the path of *imitatio Christi*. Hagiographers and supporters of modern stigmatics were aware of the ecclesiastical suspicions and concerns about visible evidence of mysticism. While the faithful and visitors did not hesitate to speak about the Fridays of Passion of the "living saints," basically no one openly wrote about the stigmata of these people or defined them as stigmatics.

After all, their goal was to promote the fame of the mystic and attempt to open a process of beatification. How would that have been possible without the bishop's *imprimatur* and *fiat*? The bishops were called to give their opinion on the candidate's virtues and prodigies before the Vatican clergy engaged in an evaluation. Presenting them as stigmatics – at least in Italy and Spain – was certainly not a wise decision. Since the sixteenth century – the time of

141 Miccoli, "Chiesa;" and Traniello, *Religione*.

142 The Spanish Inquisition, compared to Italian diocesan tribunals, was not directly dependent on Rome but on the sovereigns, and therefore linked to civil power.

143 Giordano, "Beatas."

144 Jacobson Schutte, "Finzione;" and Jacobson Schutte, *Aspiring Saints*.

the Council of Trent (1545–1563) and the foundation of the Roman Inquisition (1542)¹⁴⁵ – miracles, charisms and pretended divine gifts had raised suspicions in the Church.¹⁴⁶ It saw in alleged mystics possible charismatic counter-powers to its traditional leadership. Moreover, in the eighteenth century, canonization proceedings were reviewed, as were the mechanisms of investigation for contemporary cases. The Holy See's functioning was influenced by Enlightenment tendencies, and every investigation – both post-mortem for candidate saints or during their lifetime for people under investigation – was based on certain proofs and acts, while omitting inexplicable and miraculous elements.¹⁴⁷ The result was the exclusion of the paranormal aspects, and above all the stigmata. Consequently, these aspects were not included in hagiographies.

If supporters deemed it wise not to link potential or already recognized saints with mystical phenomena and stigmata, this was even more important for the “living saints” who wanted to avoid ecclesiastical suspicions. Defining them as stigmatics meant, according to an unwritten code, attracting Vatican doubt and criticism rather than positively promoting their fame. As mentioned above, stigmata in themselves had no sacred value. On the contrary, they triggered members of the clergy to question their nature, and were most often judged as a sign of demonic possession or fraud.

3.2.3 Negative Examples for Negative Cases?

Is it a coincidence that the anonymous author of *Le tre mirabili vergini viventi nel Tirolo* used the word “stigmatic” to refer to only one of these wonderful virgins reported in that region?¹⁴⁸ In the light of the discussion so far, perhaps not. The book,¹⁴⁹ probably written by the priest Antonio Ricciardi (certainly the author of Maria von Mörl's life), intended to depict the “Holy land Tyrol”¹⁵⁰ as the new holy land of stigmatization.¹⁵¹ The author studied the three most famous cases in detail: Maria von Mörl (1812–1868, stigmata 1834), Maria Domenica Lazzari (1815–1848, 1834) and Krescenzia Niglutsch (1816–1885, 1836). As noted above, Maria became a celebrity in the summer of 1833, when 40,000 people went to Kaltern to see her incredible ecstatic state (the stigmata appeared the following

145 Jacobson Schutte, “Finzione di santità,” 601–604; Giordano, “Beatas, Spagna,” 161–165.

146 Gotor, *I beati del papa*, 25–41 and 285–290.

147 Woodward, *Making saints*, 393; Barro, *Economics of sainthood*, 195–196 and Prosperi, “L'elemento storico,” 89–91.

148 Anonymous (Antonio Ricciardi?), *Le tre mirabili vergini viventi nel Tirolo* (1837²).

149 The first edition was published in 1836, Anonymous, *Memorie intorno a tre mirabili vergini viventi nel Tirolo* (1836).

150 Priesching, *Maria von Mörl*, 32–33.

151 Gadaleta, “Rosmini,” 100–111.

year). Maria Domenica Lazzeri, who became famous as the “Addolorata,” was ill and displayed the visible stigmata from December 1834. Krescenzia Niglutsch, however, was found to be “as ecstatic as Mörl. She is a stigmatic like the first one (von Mörl) and like Lazzeri; is Krescenzia therefore also obliged to stay in bed? Of course not.”¹⁵² With this seemingly random turn of words, the author clearly states that the *trait d’union* of the three young women were stigmata, but textually he only gives Krescenzia the label of “stigmatic.” In the lives written on the other two women, who both received famous epithets, such as “Estatica” or “Addolorata,” the term never appears. Interestingly, the fate of the three virgins was not the same, with Maria von Mörl and Maria Domenica Lazzeri never condemned by the local religious authority, in spite of the ecclesiastical investigations. Niglutsch, however, was publicly reprimanded by the Bishop of Trent for being “disobedient” – we do not know the exact reason – and her contemporaries accused her of having a liaison with her father confessor (which explained to them the disappearance of her visible stigmata).

The Niglutsch case is not isolated. In the history of the Inquisition, the term “stigmata” also appears during the early modern age and never assumes a positive value. This is evident in the condemnation of the seventeenth-century text, *De notis, et stigmatibus in corpore personarum de maleficio accusatarum repertis, [etc.]*,¹⁵³ and in the case of Lucrezia Gambarà (1704–1737), a stigmatic from the eighteenth century.¹⁵⁴ In both examples, the prodigious signs were considered by the Vatican to be the result of the devil’s intervention or fraud. Beyond the Italian borders, in Spain of the 1830s, a stigmatized nun was at the centre of a black legend founded on political intrigue and false supernatural phenomena.¹⁵⁵ The infamy of the Sor Patrocinio (1811–1891) affair (1835) spread far beyond the national court, as had occurred 30 years earlier in another case of an Italian abbess with false stigmata. After years of charismatic leadership and collaboration with the court of the Savoy, Maria Rosa Serra (1766–after 1806) was unmasked by the bishop and admitted the falsity of her prodigies, provoking a ferocious debate between critics and the faithful.¹⁵⁶

Can we explain the limited diffusion of the word “stigmatic” in Italy and Spain by linking the traditional sceptical attitude of the Holy See concerning stigmata and visible mystical phenomena with these concrete cases of public condemnation and exposure of stigmata? This apparent social-cultural-religious

152 Anonymous, *Le tre mirabili vergini*, 35.

153 ACDF, St.St. O 2 m 14, ff. 243 r–244 r.

154 ACDF, St.St. C-3-g, fasc. Lucrezia Gambarà, ff. 1–43 and BsASD (Diocesan Archive of Brescia), Processi 11, 1720–1796, 10, 20, 1729, Lucrezia Gambarà “Illusa” di Alfianello, ff. 1–45.

155 Graus, “Wonder nuns.”

156 Rossi, “Religious virtuosi.”

divergence between the countries of southern and northern Europe seems to gain confirmation in the different attitude of the Vatican to the two volumes of Imbert-Gourbeyre's book. Although the doctor was ordered "as a good Catholic to not disseminate that work [the second volume] and not publish it in a new edition,"¹⁵⁷ the overall verdict on his work was, however, that "the book [the first volume] presents nothing dangerous, or immoral."¹⁵⁸ The inquisitor Fathers made a precise decision: they explicitly condemned the section dedicated to Palma Matarrelli and forbade the spread of her fame, while for the Belgian, Louise Lateau, the judgement was substantially suspended. This attitude is also found in the investigative files kept at the Vatican congregation archive: a simple collection of information on the Belgian stigmatic,¹⁵⁹ a complete investigation of the Italian one.¹⁶⁰

A series of questions still arise: why was its stance so undefined in the first case and much harder and severe in the second one? Did the different geographical latitudes and nationalities of the two women have substantial weight in this different treatment?¹⁶¹ As we will see in the following chapter, the Vatican's cautious stance contrasted to no small extent with the enthusiasm with which many of the Catholic faithful welcomed reports on new "stigmatics."

4 Building Blocks

As a golden era of stigmatization in Europe, the nineteenth century witnessed the reinvention of stigmata and the invention of the stigmatic, with the stigmata becoming a defining feature. When we reflect on the use of the word, a few elements stand out. Firstly, the Vatican congregations avoided using the term "stigmatic" as an analytical category and were not supportive of claims of stigmatization. Thus, while we are interested in how the Vatican responded to

157 ACDF, C.L. 1875 5, f. 187 r.

158 ACDF, C.L. 1875 5, f. 186 v.

159 ACDF, St.St. C 4–f, g *Pretesa stigmatizzata Louise Lateau*.

160 ACDF, C.L., 1875, n.5, *Oria; Decreta Sancti Officii*, 1878; C 4 q; M.D. R.V. 1886 1 7; M.D. R.V. 1886 1 7 1.

161 However, it must be said that in the Italian publications, Louise Lateau was more famous as the "Ecstatic Bois-d'Haine" rather than as a "stigmatic." In three publications which spread throughout the country in the 1870s, only the Italian translation of the French book by Henri van Looy had the term stigmatic in the title. In her case, Pellicani and Trecco preferred to use, perhaps to escape Vatican censorship, the phrase, "ecstatic with stigmata." See Pellicani, *Luisa Lateau* (1872); Van Looy, *Luisa Lateau* (1876, it. translation); Trecco, "Apparizioni della Salette" (1879).

the “stigmatics” and address this in detail in Chapter 7, our study of the meaning and standardization of the type cannot start there. Secondly, experts who “collected” cases of stigmatization set the stigmatics apart as a specific category of mystics (bearing the wounds) and traced them in the past and present. Thirdly, apart from the more general meaning of the word – having stigmata – “stigmatic” also became primarily linked to a specific type: someone whose visible wounds were the main point of attraction (e.g. in contrast to a mystic who had invisible wounds, among other charismata) and, as such, someone who followed “the recipe of Louise Lateau.” We found this use of the term primarily in non-Catholic and Catholic non-expert sources. This indicated that the type was also known beyond Catholic circles and thus was not only part of the vocabulary of Catholics. We found equivalents for “stigmatic” in French, German and Dutch, indicating that the stigmatic was, or rather became, part of a shared vocabulary. The Italian and the Spanish cases suggest that the use of the word “stigmatic” for this type of mystic was a later introduction. In Italian, we found some traces of references to the “stigmatic” type increasing. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, we have almost no references – only one incidental use in the negatively evaluated Krescenzia Niglutsch. This changed at the end of the nineteenth century, when the word was linked to international celebrity stigmatics and more positively evaluated (this also occurred in Spanish). Only at the start of the twentieth century – with cases such as Gemma Galgani (1878–1903) – was the word more commonly used for Italian stigmatics (this was also the moment when the number of “stigmatics” was on the rise in Italy).¹⁶²

The stereotypical “stigmatic” did not represent the majority of the cases we traced in this period. Thus, why did this type of “stigmatic” become stereotypical rather than one of the other types; for example, the cloistered nun who received the invisible wounds that only her father confessor knew about? We believe two elements were of major importance in this respect: (1) the visibility and (2) the appeal of the “stigmatic.” As discussed above, visibility related to two aspects: the visibility of the wounds and the visibility of the “stigmatic.” We will discuss the visibility of the wounds in more detail in Chapter 3, but for our discussion here it might suffice to say that there was a difference in the importance of the wounds in comparison with previous generations of mystics. While for the eighteenth-century predecessors, their suffering, rather than their wounds, was central in the descriptions of their mystical lives, for our

¹⁶² See Leonardo Rossi, *Holiness and Sanctity. Italian Stigmatics and the Holy Office in the nineteenth and early twentieth century*, unpublished PhD (2020).

nineteenth-century “stigmatics,” the wounds were the major point of attraction and the reason why the people identified them as mystics.

With respect to the visibility of the stigmatic, we follow scholars such as Paula Kane and Joachim Boufflet, who have shown that there was a change in the profile of the stigmatic in the nineteenth century, as they became “exposed to the public gaze.” This exposure took place in different ways: people came to see them (travelling became easier because of the improved means of transportation) and they were mediatized, commercialized and politicized (these aspects will be further addressed in the following chapters). What we are arguing here is that it was this type that became the stereotypical “stigmatic.” We can postulate several hypotheses for this reduction. Firstly, they would be the stigmatics that one heard about through media coverage, for example. Secondly, because of this celebrity, they were used as examples of “stigmatics” (e.g. in lexica) and as points of comparison (“the new Louise Lateau,” “the new Therese Neuman”). Their fame influenced the filtering process in new cases: those who resembled them had a better chance of being accepted as “stigmatics.” Finally, they inspired imitation beyond the local level.

With respect to the appeal of the type, this is an issue we will address in more detail in the following chapters. If the Vatican congregations adopted a rather critical stance towards stigmatics, why did the latter trigger such a positive response among many other Catholics? What did these figures mean to them? In the following chapters, we will show that the popularity of the “stigmatic,” had much to do with them being regarded as “living saints” and religious celebrities. We will argue that the standardization of the type built on its appeal and visibility. We will also look into the religious practices that developed around their visible wounds and the accessibility of the stigmatics (who could be visited at home). In addition, we will examine the material culture (highlighting their stigmata) and visualizations (abstractions of the type),¹⁶³ as well as studying the meanings that were attached to them and how they developed into commodities. In brief, we will address the enthusiasm for “stigmatics” from a bottom-up perspective, considering what stigmatics meant to individual Catholics,¹⁶⁴ including the movements that developed around

163 On the need to go beyond textual sources, see Laycock, *The Seer*, 197: “Historians are fond of texts and this may explain why one half of the dance has received disproportionate amount of analysis. Lay practitioners are more likely to exert their influence through material culture, performance, and embodied practices. While prayers, ritual, songs, and images have just as much power to define a religious culture, they do not leave the same kind of archival record.” Meyer, “Material mediations,” 2 and 7.

164 McGuire, *Lived Religion*, 12: “The term ‘lived religion’ is useful for distinguishing the actual experience of religious persons from prescribed religion of institutionally defined beliefs

them, while also paying attention to the top-down response (e.g. condemnation or approval by ecclesiastical authorities).

Did the visibility of the stigmatics – their wounds as well as the media and other forms of attention they received – also make them easily traceable? As we demonstrated in this chapter, “stigmatic” is not an easy concept to work with. Sources on the prototypical modern stigmatics, the lay women who displayed the visible wounds and whose suffering attracted many visitors to their homes and bedrooms, are not sparse, but one needs to know how to look. We found, among other places, sources in religious archives (Vatican archives, diocesan archives, parish archives, archives of religious orders) and state and city archives under headings related to their reception, for example as “religious enthusiasm” (“religiöse Schwärmerei”), “so-called miraculous phenomena, pieties” (“sogenannte wunderbare Erscheinungen, Frömmeleien”) and “alleged miraculous phenomena” (“angebliche Wundererscheinungen”), or related to the books that discussed them (censorship and *imprimatur*¹⁶⁵), rather than the name of the stigmatic.

The collections of what we might call “stigmatic chasers” were a good starting point as they often contained information about stigmatics who never made it to the official lists. Excellent examples include the collections of: Jan Nulens,¹⁶⁶ a priest who gathered material on the Belgians stigmatics; Robert Ernst,¹⁶⁷ another priest who was not only interested in stigmatics but also collected material on other events such as apparitions; and the German layman Friedrich Ritter von Lama.¹⁶⁸ Similarly, present-day organizations and memorial houses were a means to gather information about the material culture that has been preserved, with examples being the memorial house of Louise Lateau in Bois-d’Haine and the Gedenkstätte for Anna Katharina Emmerick in Dülmen.

Studying different countries broadened the set of sources for those stigmatics who triggered interest (and commotion) beyond their regional and national borders. Furthermore, the stereotypical stigmatic was inherently part

and practices. [...] it depicts a subjectively grounded and potentially creative place for religious experience and expression. Although lived religion pertains to the individual, it is not merely subjective. Rather, people construct their religious worlds together, often sharing vivid experiences of that intersubjective reality.”

165 ACDF, *Res Doctrinales, Censurae librorum* 1875, P.I. Oria, Les stigmatisées par le Docteur A. Imbert; Boëns Hubert, Louise Lateau ou les mystères de Bois d’Haine dévoilés; BAT, Abt. R-BGV 9 Nr.229, Imprimatur 1957, “Warnung: Goebel Anna Maria, die stigmatisierte Opferseele von Bickendorf (Eifel).”

166 Antwerp, Ruusbroec Institute, Fonds Jan Nulens.

167 Eupen, Staatsarchiv Eupen (SAE), Archiv Rektor Robert Ernst.

168 München, BSB, Nachlass Lama, Friedrich von (1876–1944).

of the public sphere, and, as we have noted in the previous pages, we were particularly interested in the ways in which the fame of the modern stigmatics spread via modern (mass-produced) means (booklets, images) and newspapers, which helped to turn them into religious celebrities and “living saints.” We found some of these in special collections (e.g. those on Louise Lateau), while others were scattered throughout different libraries. Often the booklets provided references to other publications, for example, at the end of the booklet on Louise Lateau and Maria von Mörl the publisher noted that a book on Maria Domenica Lazzari and Anna Katharine Emmerick was “also on sale.”¹⁶⁹

While we do not want to mute the voices of the stigmatics or minimize the impact of their personality, the book is not so much about the individual cases as it is about the concept of the “stigmatic” and how the reputation of these women as saints and celebrities built on them bearing the wounds of Christ. The concepts of the religious celebrity and saint, and their compatibility are the topic of the next chapter. The succeeding chapters are organized thematically, but also have a chronological logic, as they follow the expansion and continuation of initial enthusiasm to the official approval or disapproval. The following two chapters focus on the devotees travelling to the homes of the stigmatic. In Chapter 3, we address their perception of the suffering of these women and examine how they could be singled out as “living saints”; while in Chapter 4 we study the practice of visiting the stigmatic, and show how the devotees helped to confirm this saintly image through their actions and campaigns. The subsequent two chapters look at how the reputation of these stigmatics spread from their houses and homes into the wider world. Chapter 5 addresses the visual and material culture, and studies the ways in which the devotees co-created the saintly and celebrity status of the stigmatics through these images and objects. Chapter 6 focuses on the public arena and shows how the idea of the stigmatic was used for political causes and featured as a symbol for Catholic causes. Finally, Chapter 7 looks into the response of the Vatican and studies how they could develop from unofficial into official saints, as well as the Vatican unease about these cases and the ways in which they were integrated into the cults of saints. In Chapter 8, we summarize our findings, focusing on the development of the type and the role that modern media and consumer culture played in this process.

169 Anonymous, *Louisa Lateau of de kruiswonddragende van Bois-d'Haine*: “Ook te koop: Maria Dominica Lazzari of de kruiswonddragende van Capriana, in het Italiaansche Tyrol gevolgd door de wonderbare levensschets van Anna Catharina Emmerich religieuze der orde van den H. Augustinus van het klooster van den Agnetenberg, te Dulmen overleden in 1824.”



FIGURE 1.5 "The Addolorata of Capriana" (Maria Domenica Lazzeri)
ANTWERP, PRIVATE COLLECTION © KRISTOF SMEYERS



FIGURE 1.6
"The Estatica of Capriana" (Maria
von Mörl)
ANTWERP, PRIVATE
COLLECTION © KRISTOF
SMEYERS