SEEING SANCTITY
This section examines the problem of rendering sanctity visible by exploring relationships between holiness and the act of seeing. Medieval creators of devotional imagery, the images themselves and their contemporary reception are all considered in three studies that each demonstrate the importance of visual works of art in medieval Christian experience and in the attainment of spiritual benefits. In “Images of the Holy and the Unholy: Analogies for the Numinous in Later Medieval Art,” I examine artistic strategies that may have helped contemporary viewers to recall their experiences of the more profound nature of divinity, that which has been described by the early twentieth-century philosopher and theologian, Rudolf Otto, as the *numinous* element in religion. Otto’s concept of the numinous complements and expands ideas about the holy articulated by his medieval predecessors, including the fifth-century Pseudo-Dionysius, whose theological and mystical ideas heavily influenced Scholastic thought. Using Dionysius and Otto as reference points, I analyse a series of later medieval images, ranging from a portrait of God the Father to visions of Antichrist, in order to ascertain how medieval artists transcended the limits of iconography to facilitate viewer contemplation of the mysterious depths of both the divine and the damned.

Michael Bury elucidates a neglected yet fascinating genre of devotional imagery in “The Measure of the Virgin’s Foot.” In 1610 in Venice, a controversy arose as an official response to the sale of impressions of a printed outline of the Virgin’s foot, claimed to have been derived from a measurement of her shoe. The impression was accompanied by the notification of an indulgence, which was to be gained by kissing the image and by saying certain prayers. The category of abstracted image to which the ‘measure’ of the Virgin’s foot belongs also includes images of the ‘measure’ of Christ’s wound, known from popular medieval prayerbooks, that also claimed to be the precise measurement of an actual object. But both types of images are abstractions that neither reproduce, nor claim to reproduce, the concrete objects to which they refer. Because of this important difference in the relationship between the image and its prototype, pictorial ‘measures’ contrast sharply with better-known types of devotional imagery of a more naturalistic variety that were calculated to arouse devotion by means of direct emotional appeal. The author describes several examples of holy ‘measures’ and explains how such a starkly abstract type of image nevertheless possessed such great devotional appeal and apparent spiritual efficacy.