

**Barbara Baert**

**Who touched my clothes? The Healing of a Woman with a Flow of Blood Within Text, Image and Taboo in the Visual Culture of the Early Middle Ages**

The episode with the bleeding woman is recounted in the Synoptic Gospels: Mark 5:24-34, Luke 8: 42-48 and Matthew 9: 19-22. The story is recited in the context of the raising of Jairus' daughter and occurs when Jesus crossed the Sea of Galilee, or on the shore to the west of the Hebrew territory. Hemorrhage is identified from the mass as an anonymous woman, unnamed, with the ultimate wish: to cure her bleeding that persists for twelve years. She hopes this will happen if she could touch the garments of Christ. The iconography of the bleeding expanded into a variety of media: sarcophagi and sculptures, textiles, reliquaries, amulets, manuscripts, mosaics and wall paintings. The miracle of healing of the bleeding infiltrates even in the world of magic and medicine, where a savage terrain for taboo of hysteria is fostered. At the level of sarcophagi this subject has remained hidden, at least on the surface, since the hysteria of Hemorrhage is presented in the same time in formulas of exorcism in jewels and protective amulets. This reveals an interaction among the miracle of text, the classic iconography of Early Christian healing and magical practices. It is as if Hemorrhage had been elevated in Gospels to the protector of women and men against the fearful swelling and bleeding of the uterus. If we reconstruct the story of the bleeding in its *Nachleben* in text and iconography, it easily becomes the story of the blood. Sacrificial blood as opposed to procreative blood, male blood opposite to the female blood, normal blood opposite of taboo blood, tangible blood against untouchable blood, briefly seen as the good blood against evil. The ambivalence of the blood also reflects the transfer of Jewish rules of purity to the Christian doctrine of healing. The tension around the blood culminates in the sacred zone where the healing of the bleeding woman is related to the Holy Blood of the Eucharist, even though the sources of its time quotes it as a negative example, that of the menstruating woman in church.