

The Martyrdom of St. Ursula and the 11,000 Virgins



According to a medieval legend, St Ursula and her 11,000 companions returned to Cologne from their pilgrimage to Rome just at the time when unbeknown to them, the Huns were besieging the city. As soon as they disembarked, the Huns leapt upon them with savage cries and the massacre began. In the picture, the leader of the Huns on the right is willing to stop the massacre if Ursula would consent to marry him, but she refuses and is martyred together with her companions, while the angels carry their souls to heaven. The Huns are depicted here in fanciful Turkish costume, as when this picture was painted, the Ottoman Turks were perceived to be the modern equivalent of Huns, the major enemy of Christendom.