



# **The Faithful Executioner: Life and Death, Honor and Shame in the Turbulent Sixteenth Century**

*Joel F. Harrington*

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THE EXTRAORDINARY STORY OF A RENAISSANCE-ERA EXECUTIONER AND HIS WORLD, BASED ON A RARE AND OVERLOOKED JOURNAL.

In a dusty German bookshop, the noted historian Joel F. Harrington stumbled upon a remarkable document: the journal of a sixteenth-century executioner. The journal gave an account of the 394 people Meister Frantz Schmidt executed, and the hundreds more he tortured, flogged, or disfigured for more than forty-five years in the city of Nuremberg. But the portrait of Schmidt that gradually emerged was not that of a monster. Could a man who practiced such cruelty also be insightful, compassionate? even progressive?

In *The Faithful Executioner*, Harrington teases out the hidden meanings and drama of Schmidt's journal. Deemed an official outcast, Meister Frantz sought to prove himself worthy of honor and free his children from the stigma of his profession. Harrington uncovers details of Schmidt's life and work: the shocking, but often familiar, crimes of the day; the medical practice that he felt was his true calling; and his lifelong struggle to reconcile his craft with his religious faith.

In this groundbreaking and intimate portrait, Harrington shows us that our thinking about justice and punishment, and our sense of our own humanity, are not so remote from the world of *The Faithful Executioner*.

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