

Death, Sanctity, and the Cross



Crucified Saints in Image and Text

edited by

Barbara Crostini and Anthony John Lappin



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sanctorum

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I-00198 ROMA

tel. 06 84 17 758

fax 06 85 35 39 60

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BARBARA CROSTINI and ANTHONY JOHN LAPPIN

Background and Chapter Summary

This volume has been prepared for the series *Sanctorum. Scritture, pratiche, immagini* of AISSCA (Associazione Italiana per lo Studio della Santità, dei Culti e dell’Agiografia), having originated in a panel held in 2018 at the Society’s second meeting of the *Cantieri dell’Agiografia* at the Biblioteca Angelica in Rome. Contributions were subsequently expanded with a call for papers, and we are indebted to each author for the result of this rich volume.

The intention was from the start to explore the topic of crucified saints diachronically, to describe this phenomenon beyond its more usual foci: Saint Peter and medieval blood-libel. The nature of the enterprise was not aimed at comprehensiveness, but the result is, we believe, quite extensive, and certainly enough to whet the appetite for more: more knowledge and details, more contextualization, more names of saints, more examples, more research on cults. Above all, searching for this type of displayed sanctity may disclose important nodes in the understanding and articulation of the *sequela Christi* in its particular form of the *imitatio Christi crucifixi*. The centrality of the crucifix that we sometimes take for granted took longer in affirming itself and crucified saints played a significant role in mediating and establishing the rationale for this presence, especially when divorced from its Eucharistic context.

We would like to thank AISSCA, and especially Tommaso Caliò, for unflinching support to this project, and every contributor for their efforts and patience. The 2020 Covid pandemic is largely responsible for delays and has regrettably left its mark even on the finished product. The bias of the editors’ fields will be apparent from the volume’s contents but we

trust that the combined energies will deliver a useful product that can fuel future conversations.

Summary of the volume

The articles in the present volume have been ordered chronologically, even though many contributions span within them several centuries, so this criterion can be slightly misleading for the reader. It opens with an introductory chapter by BARBARA CROSTINI, who draws inspiration from the pivotal images from the early sixteenth-century series of the Ten Thousand Crucified Martyrs on Mount Ararat by Vittore Carpaccio, which presents a late-antique story for a Venetian audience within an atmosphere of impendent crisis. Venice was very much at the crossroads of east and west, and the significance of the cult of crucified saints in Byzantium and beyond is here examined through analysis of a representation of the martyrdom of the Apostles in a ninth-century collection of Gregory of Nazianzen's homilies, the 'Paris Gregory' (Paris. gr. 510) and the various representations of crucified saints in the eleventh-century Menologion of Basil II (Vat. gr. 1613), and then returning to the highly influential series of devotional prints by the Wierix brothers of the mid-sixteenth century which spread around the globe and which produced a typology of crucified saints divided by sex or age. Crostini explores the ideas of Christomimesis implicit in deaths as disparate as St Peter's and al-Ḥallāj's, pointing to an early and influential understanding of death by crucifixion, not just as a following Christ but as a doubling or becoming another Christ. The collections of saints reviewed in this essay self-referentially reflect the endeavour of the volume as a whole.

FABRIZIO PETORELLA looks to the active role played by the cross in the late-antique Latin *Passio* of Saint Andrew, which he describes as an 'active remake' within a multi-lingual stemma. The *Passio*, he argues, is a didactic text advocating the value not only of patience in suffering but also active discipleship for the proper understanding of the significance of the cross and suffering itself. Worked around a dialogue between Andrew and his persecutor, Aegeas, the text contrasts inquisition and torture as a means of establishing the truth with discipleship and experience as a lived-out witnessing to the truth, a 'training' of 'athletes'. In this process, then, the cross becomes not a *symbol* of belief, but rather the true protagonist

of the tale, as a theological discourse is woven around it as the means of accessing an experiential truth.

The theme of the cross is set within a wider frame of late-antique and early medieval hagiography by MARCO PAPASIDERO in his contribution to the collection, with a particular focus upon the Latin *Passiones* of the crucified apostles, Peter and Andrew; of crucified male saints, Agricola and Nestor; of female saints, Julia and Eulalia; and the *Passio* of the Ten Thousand Martyrs of Mount Ararat, also discussed in the introductory essay. Papisidero emphasises the importance of preaching from the cross, adding a gendered perspective in the cases of Julia and Eulalia, arguing that crucifixion, through its inevitable Christomimesis, implies a dissolving of gender difference, as the martyr is assimilated to Christ.

The focus on the world of Late Antiquity is maintained in NUNZIO BIANCHI's paper, which considers the crucifixions that were a recurring plot-feature of Iamblichus's *Babylonian Stories*, a text which has not survived but was summarized in chapter 94 of Photios's *Library*. Through a painstaking analysis, he establishes that, in the extant fragments, only a few words and locutions related to the condemnation on the cross can be recognized as actually belonging to the original novel. Crucifixion is here an integral part of the fictional world of rocambolesque action, offering an original angle from which to view other saints' stories.

Julia, who featured in Papisidero's analysis, is also the centre of the investigation offered by GIANNI BERGAMASCHI. Taking a highly philological approach, he parses the multiple traditions, and offers the image of a cult originating initially in Lombard devotion, progressing to centre itself upon the town and region of Lucca. He further traces the numerous examples of her cult, including Hieronymus Bosch's famous triptych and the modern pilgrimage route, the *Cammino di Santa Giulia*.

In his wide-ranging essay, ADRIANO DUQUE approaches the role of crucifixion within the Dar al-Islam, with particular emphasis upon the Caliphate of Córdoba. Whilst crucifixion still held a role as a means of execution in the Islamic commonwealth, the punishment was wielded by authorities keen to show their religious credentials, as those invested with true authority, and the restorative power of the condemnation, by which the transgressor of the peace was brought back, through a suffering death, to the eventual heavenly rewards of the faithful. Such condemnations were used to rescind the apostasy of converts to Christianity, casting them as miscreants yet retrieving them as Muslims, essentially cancelling out their

own choices in the matter. Such public spectacles always had a political dimension, and Duque pays careful attention to the theatrical executions in 939 of Furtūn ibn Muḥammad, governor of Huesca, and his captains, who had withdrawn from a battle, an action which led to ignominious defeat for the caliph of Córdoba, ‘Abd al-Rahmān III. Suspicions about Furtūn’s religious allegiances may also have played a part in his demise, although it is certain that the execution itself was filled with eschatological associations.

STEFFEN HOPE offers a view of how Benedictine hagiographers negotiated, even at times capitalized upon, similarities with the crucifixion found within their royal subjects’ deaths. King Edmund of East Anglia died in 863 at the hands of Danish raiders; the various tortures inflicted upon him after he surrenders himself into their power are strongly reminiscent of the Passion narrative, culminating in his death whilst bound to a tree – which becomes a *stipes* (stake, upright), and then *signum* (sign [perhaps ‘of the cross’]), in the liturgical office a century later. Both hagiographical and liturgical commemoration of the holy king reflect the enduring stability of monastic reformers’ conceptions of holy, even sacral, kingship. Knut Rex, king of Denmark, met his demise in an insurrection brought on by over-enthusiastic tax-collection to fund a planned expedition to England in 1086. Knut’s strengthening of church organization made him a likely subject for memorialization, and his death was also infused with symbolism, with elements recalling the Passion added over the various reformulations of his hagiography.

ANDREW BERESFORD provides an in-depth study of the role of crucifixion in late-medieval images of Saint Bartholomew as part of the reception of Jacobus de Voragine’s influential account of the saint’s martyrdom in his *Legenda aurea*, observing that the saint is only sometimes depicted as crucified (on a pole, a saltire, or upside-down), and explores the symbolic interaction of these positions with the process of flaying with which they are inevitably combined. Of particular importance is the inverted crucifixion – like Saint Peter – which both increases the physical suffering and may point towards conceptions of rebirth. The flaying of the saint, and the display of the gory sight of the saint’s inside together with a lifeless and ghostly outside skin grant Bartholomew a new and malleable identity, an indeterminacy which is eventually assimilated by the cross, which provides the interpretative key by which Bartholomew’s separation of body from skin may be understood. The Apostle took up his cross and

followed Christ, and hence could provide succour to his devotees' own sufferings.

Beginning with two images from early fifteenth-century manuscripts, CORINNA TANIA GALLORI traces the development of the 'crucified monk' as a characterization, and exaltation, of the monastic or conventual life. This is not a representation of a particular martyr or named saint, but rather the *homo interior*, indicating a spiritual crucifixion undertaken as part of the monk's (and, in the century that followed, the nun's) life in the cloister. The image, then, in its numerous inflexions, presented an allegorical understanding of the regular life not as a paradise but as a locus of sacrifice and penitential suffering. The image depended upon a long-standing comparison of the monastic life with penitential crucifixion, and so Gallori turns back to the thirteenth century to consider how similar ideas informed the characterization of St Francis of Assisi's pre-eminent image as 'crucified friar' and consequently made more acceptable this explicit form of representation.

MARCOS NIETO JIMÉNEZ turns the focus of the volume onto the early modern period with his study of the politics which lay behind the fusion of the saintly figures of Wilgefortis and Liberata. Wilgefortis was the bearded female placed on a cross by her irate father and her cult was centred upon the Low Countries. However, the details of her life seemed to place her in the Mediterranean: her father a pagan king of Portugal; her erstwhile suitor, a pagan king of Sicily. This connexion perhaps led Jean Molanus, professor at Louvain, to equate Wilgefortis with Saint Liberata (a saint whose Portuguese back-story had already been developed in the fifteenth century) in his updating of Usuard's *Martyrology* in 1568. Nieto thus traces the intertwining of these two saints from Habsburg lands, as Liberata-Wilgefortis came to symbolize the inclusion of Portuguese and Netherlanders within the empire. The equation began to exert a considerable change in the iconography of Liberata as she took on the attributes of Wilgefortis. When Portugal gained its independence, at least in Portuguese authors, however, the union was broken as all bridges with Spain were efficiently severed. Finally, in an important excursus, Marcos teases apart the complex publication history of works connected to these two women saints.

Our focus remains on the Iberian peninsula with PABLO JESÚS LORITE CRUZ's analysis of the presence of Saint Dismas, the good thief, in the southern Spanish sculptural representations of Calvary, either as devotional

figures or as part of the Holy Week celebrations where the scene of the Crucifixion is carried in procession around city centres by confraternities who lift the heavy *pasos* on which the figures are placed and who, from the sixteenth century to the present day, have commissioned and preserved the sculptures. Lorite Cruz describes the stylistic modes of representation of the Good Thief, the theological ideas behind these choices, and the relation of the depictions with those of other crucified saints, such as Saint Serapius or Santo Dominguito del Val. Here, we may witness how a crucified saint has a role within popular devotion, and can exhibit a consistent artistic presence (often in sculptures of the highest quality).

IRINA BRÄNDÉN also considers female crucifixion, via the *vita*-icons of Saint Paraskeva of Ikonion, one of whose tortures takes the form of a crucifixion, where she is therefore depicted naked, with arms outstretched, as in one of the biographical vignettes that populate the edge of the icon which is dominated by the central, hieratic image of the saint. The name, *Paraskeva*, means ‘Friday’, and so the saint is linked to the day of Christ’s crucifixion, and her martyrdom is accompanied by objects associated with Christ’s Passion – the crown of thorns, the lance, the sponge. The similarity is deepened in the scene of her torture by being scorched with candles, for which she is stretched out on a cross in a scene whose background and arrangement also consciously echoes scenes of the Crucifixion, an equation which Brändén argues is designed to reproduce a similar parallel made in the saint’s *vita* within the dialogue between Paraskeva and her torturer. The visual imagery thus recuperates an aspect of the image of the saint which would otherwise have been lost, putting forward through iconographic allusions the connexion between Paraskeva’s sufferings and those of Christ.

FELIPE E. ROJAS undertakes a ‘queer’ reading of Miguel de Cervantes’s short play, *Los baños de Argel*, which drew on Cervantes’s own experiences in such Muslim prisons where Christian captives were kept. The story presents a Christian captive child, Francisquito, who refuses the pedophilic advances of his new owner, the *qāḍī* of Algiers, and is consequently crucified. His father consoles him as he suffers upon the cross by comparing him to Christ, and subsequently returns to Spain with Francisquito’s relics. Drawing on similarities between Cervantes’s drama and the tenth-century martyrdom of the child-saint Pelagius, similarly executed for refusing the sexual approaches of ‘Abd al-Rahmān III, Rojas constructs an argument in which Francisquito rejects one same-sex lover for another, namely Christ;

Francisquito's presence on the cross is thus a sexualization of the child. His father's presence at the foot of this cross and his later mourning for his son equates him with the Virgin Mary and thus, through the gender-switching, provides a 'queer' representation of the Crucifixion.

The late MARGHERITA BELLI, in her final article curated by her colleagues, Giacinta Spinosa and Marta Fattori, provides a discussion of the crucified martyrs of Japan, and in particular Agnes Takeda and her three lay companions in martyrdom: Ioanna, her mother-in-law, Magdalena, another noble woman, and her son, Ludovico. Detailing the original, meticulous account by the Jesuit, Luis de Cerqueira, Belli explains how this was used as a primary source by later historians; the martyrs' example is even used by a commentator on the Catechism of the Council of Trent. In all of these accounts, Belli takes note of the changes of emphases according to the contexts in which the authors were writing, even expanding her analysis to take in two dramatic works. The first, *Gli eroi del Giappone* by Giuseppe Berneri (who wrote devotional works closely connected to Saint Philip Neri's Oratory during the late seventeenth century), aimed for a primarily emotional response from its audience in the form of *compunctio cordis* and relegated Agnes to a supporting role for her husband whose crisis of faith but subsequent martyrdom provided the dramatic focus. In the second, the tragedy by Alfonso Varano, *Agnese, martire del Giappone* (written roughly a century after Berneri's work), Agnes's constancy is set against various arguments for abandoning the faith (such as friendship, piety, loyalty to ancient traditions or the ruler, social advancement). Berneri wrote still in the ethos of the Counter Reformation, defending Catholicism against the attacks of Protestantism; Varano, however, was much more preoccupied with the Enlightenment hostility of atheists and deists.

CARLO PELLICCIA broadens the view of the Japanese martyrs through a bibliographic study of Italian works dealing with the twenty-six martyrs of Japan (executed in Nagasaki in 1597) from the seventeenth down to the nineteenth century. These works, in the main, were published after their beatification and canonization by Urban VIII and Pius IX in 1627 and 1862, respectively. The publications began with a short pamphlet, followed by direct translations from other languages; or concentrated either on the three Jesuits martyred, or the twenty-three Franciscans. Although the publications were mainly sermons or orations in praise of the martyrs, serious historical works were not absent, particularly in the

nineteenth century; nor was poetry at the same time. The works, however, through their subject-matter conveyed the various tensions and hostilities between the religious orders that had also marked the period of mission in the Far East. Nineteenth-century publications, too, reflected a new interest in Japan as the latter sought points of contact with European powers as part of its campaign of modernization.

ANTHONY JOHN LAPPIN closes the volume with a consideration of the use made of images of crucifixion in modern English-language literature and also considers some contemporary art. Beginning with the contrast of two key metaphysical treatments of the idea of crucifixion – by Ted Hughes and Czesław Miłosz –, Lappin takes in the various political and campaigning invocations of the Crucifixion from the first half of the twentieth century, with particular emphasis upon the Sacco-Vanzetti trial and execution and the poets of the Harlem Renaissance in their diagnosis of brutal racial discrimination. The second half of the chapter looks at the radical re-imagining of the Passion narrative that began with Khalil Gibran at the beginning of the twentieth century but found amongst its most important interpreters Seamus Heaney, in the concluding poem of a series meditating on the recent death of his father; and, amongst others, Mary Karr's recurring evocation of the crucifixion as the centre-point of her autobiographic poetry, together with Scott Cairns' granting of a monologue to the bad thief, Gestas. Overall, a movement during the century can be traced from the relatively stereotypical invocations of the Crucifixion or its wooden application to other causes towards a much more thoughtful, even numinous, engagement with the spiritual aspects of Christ's Crucifixion and the crucifixion of others in various forms, mirroring in some way how Hughes' metaphysical nihilism in the *Crow* poems is supplanted with a no less difficult, yet much more fundamentally religious, sensibility epitomized by Miłosz.