



# JESUS AND THE MAKING OF THE MODERN MIND, 1380-1520

LUKE CLOSSEY

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*Luke Clossey*





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This book about Jesus and the world  
is dedicated to my parents  
in gratitude for their introducing me  
to both subjects





# Acknowledgements

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In the 1940s, a pair of mathematicians accused each other of non-existence. Both believed the other to be merely a pseudonym for an anonymous collective. I/we would like to acknowledge the truth and usefulness in perceiving the Luke Clossey who wrote this book as something other than a unified individual. The joy of frequent and deep collaboration enlivens these pages and saves them from being just an artifact of two decades' obsessive work-aholicism.

I began this "Global Jesus Research Project" on 1 April 2005, when I wrote to a number of museums and archives to let them know I was coming for all their Jesus-related materials. After debating whether it was an April Fool's prank, staff at the McCord Stewart Museum in Montreal went to great lengths to make their vast holdings accessible—the first of many acts of generosity toward this research.

Long-suffering "Jesus hunters" accompanied me in the field, descending on churches, mosques, libraries, museums, and archives for textual and visual Jesus examples. As the book's focus narrowed to the fifteenth century, though, some of our discoveries found themselves waiting patiently for a sequel. I salute the patience and good humour of Alda Alari and Andrea Bacianini (Italy), Denis Boko (Balkans), Chad Denton (Korea), Michael Farrelly (Fujian, Taiwan, Thailand, Philippines), Ken Feinstein (Japan), Kyle Jackson (India, Africa, South America), Daryl Kinsman (Ontario), Brandon Marriott (Turkey, Georgia, Armenia, the Caribbean), Astrid Meier (Germany, France), Antonino Nicotra (Finland), Martin Pjecha (Hungary, Slovakia, Poland), Andrew Redden (Wales, Sicily, Morocco), Paweł Stefaniak (Poland), Vlad Vintila (Transylvania, California, Israel), and Leo Wang (Russia). In the chaos of fieldwork, some impromptu helpers' names have been regrettably forgotten or shyly never known. May a few stand for many: the Bulgarian father-son duo who convoyed us to the North Macedonian border, the generous Roman who bought us postcards when the museum could not break our five-euro note, and the Keralan driver whose enthusiasm kept us working when we were well ready to be throwing back sweet-lime juices at the hotel.



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Luke Clossey  
Simon Fraser University



# Abbreviations

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## Bible Books

|      |   |
|------|---|
| Ps   | Psalms (Masoretic numbering, with Greek numbering in brackets where useful) |
| Mt   | Gospel of Matthew   |
| Lk   | Gospel of Luke  |
| Mk   | Gospel of Mark  |
| Jn   | Gospel of John  |
| 1 Jn | First Epistle of John   |

## Islamic Apocrypha

|    |   |
|----|---|
| A  | item in Miguel Asín Palacios, <i>Logia et agrapha domini Jesu</i> (Turnhout: Brepols, 1990) |
| D  | page in Daniel Deleanu, ed., <i>The Islamic Jesus</i> (San Jose: Writers Club, 2002)        |
| Kh | item in Tarif Khalidi, ed., <i>The Muslim Jesus</i> (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2001)       |
| R  | page in James Robson, ed., <i>Christ in Islam</i> (London: Murray, 1929)                    |

## Bibliographical

|      |  |
|------|--|
| BL   | British Library, London  |
| BnF  | Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris  |
| BodL | Bodleian Library, University of Oxford   |
| BSB  | Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich  |
| CWE  | <i>Collected Works of Erasmus</i><br>(Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974–)                         |
| OC   | Jean Gerson, <i>Oeuvres complètes</i> , ed. Palémon Glorieux, 10 vols.<br>(Paris: Desclée et Cie, 1960–73) |

## Other

|      |  |
|------|--|
| CF   | <i>cantus firmus</i>                                     |
| LASS | Lateran Palace image (l'Acheropita del Sancta Sanctorum) |
| LHA  | <i>L'homme armé</i>                                      |
| SOM  | Sermon on the Mount                                      |



# INTRODUCTION



# 1. The Book in a Nutshell

---



Fig. 1.1 Prayer Bead with the Adoration of the Magi and the Crucifixion (early sixteenth century), Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, public domain, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/464449>

In a medieval Irish story, the Ulster princess Ness was about to give birth on the very first Christmas Eve. Her druid companion, who might also have been her lover and/or father, advised her to wait a day so that her son would share a birthday with Jesus. She agreed: “If it do not come out through my side, it shall not come out any other way until that time arrive.” Ness waited the day at the side of a river and so gave birth on Christmas. She named the son after the river: Conchobar.

When he was in his twenties, Conchobar mac Nessa, now king of Ulster, narrowly survived being shot by a ball made up of lime mixed with the brains of Mesgegra, king of Leinster. Mesgegra’s killer had preserved it as a trophy, which



was then the custom; warriors could compare their brain-balls to determine bragging rights. Conchobar's physician deemed the ball, lodged two-thirds of the way into the royal skull, too dangerous to remove, and so stitched it up with golden thread and ordered Conchobar to abstain from horse riding, sex, feasting, running, and anger.

Seven years later, an eclipse (or maybe an earthquake) alarmed Conchobar, and a druid or Roman diplomat (variously) explained that Jesus, who shared a birthday with Conchobar, had just been crucified. Conchobar then declared his faith in Jesus, "my foster-brother and coeval." Although regretfully acknowledging that he was not geographically close enough to wage war against the Jews who arranged Jesus's death, Conchobar could not help angrily running into the sea "up to his teeth." As a result, Mesgegra's brains exploded, instantly killing Conchobar. The blood counted as a baptism in the rules of salvation, and, with his earlier pronouncement of faith, Conchobar effectively became a Christian. His soul went to hell, but was quickly rescued by Jesus and thus saved. Conchobar became the first Irishman in heaven.<sup>1</sup>

Fundamentally, this book is a gently curated compilation of ideas, images, and stories from what we loosely call the Jesus "cult." We use that word in its old sense, without any of its current negative connotations, to refer to the people who *cult*-ivated any kind of relationship with Jesus. "Cult" and "cultivate" both come from the Latin "cultus," meaning "nurtured," which could be applied equally to a field or to a god.

## Jesus and the Late Traditional World

The issue that first hooked me as a history student was the distance between two mental universes, loosely called "traditional" and "modern." Why do we think differently than they did? Why, for example, does Conchobar's antisemitism endure, when brain-ball bullets have fallen out of use? We might find Conchobar's life "barbaric," but what would he think of us today?

These issues led me to Jesus—not incidentally one of the constants between Conchobar's life and our own. Arguably the most important, enduring figure across the traditional and modern worlds, Jesus has been embedded in the hearts and minds of billions of people worldwide for nearly two millennia. As a result, Jesus's influence and range make him a useful yardstick for measuring modernity.

---

1 Quotations are from the mid-fifteenth-century *Liber Flavus Fergusiorum*, Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, MS 23 O 48 (b), fol. 52r ("Is ē sin ēimh," "innti conruigi a fiacui"). The overall summary draws from several manuscripts translated in Kuno Meyer, *The Death-Tales of the Ulster Heroes* (Dublin: Hodges, Figgis, and Co., 1906), 2–21. See Kuno Meyer, ed., "Irish Miscellanies: Anecdota from the Stowe MS. n° 992," *Revue Celtique* 6 (1883–85): 178–82.

This research agenda also dictated this book's timeframe. I study the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries, what most historians call the "Early Modern" world. For me, this is the "Late Traditional." While referring to the same centuries, this new name reframes them on their own terms. Scholars of the Early Modern work hard to unearth bits of modernity, but Late Traditional peoples themselves were surrounded by tradition: rather than striding onto the highway to modernity, they rambled around an anarchy of divergent paths. My previous book's chronology began in 1540, and I am more comfortable in that later period.<sup>2</sup> As I was researching the Late Traditional Jesus, the need to focus on a more restricted timeframe brought me to the fifteenth century, which beckoned precisely because it was so foreign. This is the most recent century where my toes cannot reach the bottom of the pool: I can find a few emotional and rhetorical kindred spirits, but I cannot form a mind meld with anyone. I do not share a basic logic with anyone until the following century.



Fig. 1.2 The Late Traditional World, map by Taf Richards, Arcane Atlas Cartography (@Arcane\_Atlas), CC BY-NC.

2 Luke Clossey, *Salvation and Globalization in the Early Jesuit Missions* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2008), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511497278>

The Late Traditional World centred on a densely populated Asian “Core” (see Fig. 1.1). From Delhi, roughly the global population centre, you could look out towards a less populated “Near West” between the Indus River and the Levant, and beyond that to a peripheral European “Far West” extending to the Atlantic.<sup>3</sup> These “Ploughlands,” all fed by plough agriculture, featured extensive networks between cities, especially in the Core. In 1400, the Jesus cult largely corresponded with the scope of these lands; it was densest in the Far and Near Wests, and more socially marginal in the Core. Only a few merchants and colonists brought the Jesus cult with them beyond these Ploughlands, into Greenland and the eastern African coast.

Free of geographic constraints, this study considers its subject from the widest possible perspective. Jesus—when not upstaged by his mother Mary<sup>4</sup>—was central to Christians while also being an important prophet and saint to Muslims. The manuscript treats both the Bible and Qur’an as Jesus-scriptures, and both churches and mosques as Jesus-temples. In far smaller numbers, after centuries of persecution, some in the Asian Core even understood Jesus as part of the Manichaeon-Buddhist pantheons. The fifteenth century also saw the Jesus cult beginning to globalize, beyond the Ploughlands and into northernmost Europe, the Americas, and Sub-Saharan Africa. Beyond Christianity and Islam, Jesus came to interact with new peoples as an alien god, and faced complex responses including conversion and resistance.

For simplicity’s sake, this book refers to a wide variety of “Jesuses”—from battleships to blood-splattered woodcuts. However, as we will see, not all uses of the name “Jesus” were necessarily meant to refer to the man himself. Conversely, not all “Jesuses” carry that name. Much like how a newlywed who has taken a partner’s surname remains, to some degree, a member of their original family, many Jesus examples also acquired new names. In general, efforts have been made to include such hidden crypto-Christ. For example, some characteristics of Jesus drifted east over centuries, eventually becoming associated with beings in the Asian Core. The Buddha Akshobhya, *née* Jesus, is recognized here as a Jesus, even if no local knew his name or this aspect of his history.

---

3 Beyond the Far West, Sub-Saharan Africa and the Americas had a far lesser population density and were far more tenuously connected to the Core.

4 The satire *La Desputoison de Dieu et de sa mère*, from about 1400, has Jesus bemoaning his mother’s greater importance, such that the most famous churches were dedicated to her. Ernst Langlois, ed., “La Desputoison de Dieu et de sa mère,” *Mélanges d’archéologie et d’histoire* 5 (1885): 54–61.

## Jesus and the Two Kens

Over the last two decades, a dozen research assistants and I, in the course of field work in fifty countries, have accumulated thousands of images and tens of thousands of text files on Jesus. What to do with all this data? Most importantly, I wanted my argument to “consonate” with the sources, to run with the grain, and to be intelligible and interesting, even if not persuasive, to a Late Traditional person.<sup>5</sup>

Initially, I had planned to let the sources speak for themselves, but I often found myself unable to hear what they were saying. That is, many of these Jesus examples—like Conchobar and his brain-blood baptism—were opaque to my own habitual ways of thinking and feeling. I recognized that I had certain views of how reality works that were interfering with my comprehension of the sources.

We can better understand the making of modern minds by better understanding pre-modern minds. By studying such puzzling examples, I was able to define the precise gaps in my thinking. Two perspectives coalesced: the “deep ken” and the “plain ken.” “Ken” is a fossil word referring to the extent of one’s knowledge, ability, or vision; it survives in assertions that something is “beyond one’s ken.” The “deep ken” uncovers meanings and connections—such as between Irish earthquakes and the Crucifixion—that the plain ken denies, discounts, or overlooks. The “plain ken” locates Jesus in a less subtle world, one bound by the modern rules of space and time. Seen with the deep ken, my strange Jesus examples began to make sense; this perspective recovered the intelligence and plausibility of these alien ways of thinking about Jesus. The plain ken’s dominance over the deep ken is distinctive of modern minds, but it is also our great obstacle in understanding the logics of the fifteenth century.

As a twenty-first-century Canadian historian, I am most comfortable thinking with the plain ken. Through this framework, I have come to recognize it not as an absolute truth, but as just one of two fundamentally different ways of understanding life. Of course, most people understand different things in different ways; the kens are not mutually exclusive. The theologian Eberhard Waltmann (fl. 1450s) argued that while God could (deep ken) have created Jesus with multiple foreskins, the restrictions of our human universe (plain ken) limited Him to one (see Chapter 9).<sup>6</sup> The deep and plain kens cannot be glossed as “religious” and “secular” perspectives. Since the eighteenth century, and especially today, many Christians have looked out with a plain-ken perspective

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5 Luke Clossey, Kyle Jackson, Brandon Marriott, Andrew Redden, and Karin Vélez, “The Unbelieved and Historians, Part I: A Challenge,” *History Compass* 14 (2016): 594–602.

6 Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, Cod. Guelf. 630b Helmst., fol. 14rv.

onto a world without miracles. Conversely, some atheistic scientists today accept the truth of statements suggesting that the universe has deep-ken purposeful motivations, such as “Trees produce oxygen so that animals can breathe.”<sup>7</sup> Almost every person examined in this book was religious. Some mostly used the deep ken, others mostly the plain ken. Many shifted between the two depending on the context. The same is true today.

The plain ken is itself a product of history, one that Jesus can help us locate, recognize, and understand. Indeed, the Far West struggled with the challenges of thinking about and with Jesus in this period. Jesus was complex and begged questions. He is at once fully divine and fully human—how do we depict that visually? Four semi-consistent Gospels exist that often contradict the Qur’an—is that human error, in the middle of divine revelation? How do we chant our liturgy in a coherent way that connects Hebrew psalms to the life of Jesus a millennium later? This messiness meant that Jesus might have even been a driving force in the development of the plain ken. Possibly he was not just a coincidental repeat bystander, but a catalyst of change. Before there could be a quest for the historical Jesus, there had to be a quest for history. Before there could be a quest for history, there also had to be a plain ken that saw the universe historically.

## The Two Kens between Traditional and Modern

The ubiquity of Jesus in the fifteenth-century world means that a comprehensive study of his cult criss-crosses traditional disciplinary boundaries. In the Far West, scripture, art, ethics, and music were all tentatively reorienting themselves towards the plain ken. This book deduces the deep ken, and catalogues the rise of the plain ken, in a wide range of subjects, especially in visual arts and textual scholarship, but also in abstract subjects like theology and music, and more earthy subjects like sex and bowling. The funky geometry of pre-Renaissance art reflects the funky chronology of the pre-Renaissance exegetes, for example, who identified Jesus as both preceding and succeeding Moses. Neither art nor exegesis remains funky when viewed with the deep ken. Plain-ken artists located Biblical narratives in visual spacetime even as plain-ken scholars located them in historical spacetime.

This approach reworks the usual modernization narrative that was once of paramount interest to historians. Even as it has become a rather neglected debate, this narrative still remains implicit, omnipresent, and influential, for example in our periodization. The phrase “shift towards plain ken,” for instance, is more

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7 Deborah Kelemen, Joshua Rottman, and Rebecca Seston, “Professional Physical Scientists Display Tenacious Teleological Tendencies,” *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General* 142 (2013): 1074–83.

precise and more neutral than the phrase “modernization.” The emphasis is placed not on the transition from medieval to modern, but rather on a shift in balance—from a multifaceted mind *more* dominated by the deep ken to a mind *more* dominated by the plain ken. The book is not a statistical study, but this claim is an impression based on having worked with thousands of Jesus examples, many of which people the chapters to come. As a new framework, the kens avoid the implications our prejudices have associated with “traditional” and “modern,” especially the sense that one is better than the other. They do not map onto concepts used by previous historians as indices of modernity but do connect with them in varied ways (see Appendix A).

This shift occurred in a world where some societies had already experimented with the plain ken. The Far West was neither precocious nor extraordinary. Tenth-century Chinese artists used the plain-ken to develop the photorealistic, plain-ken “linear perspective” before rejecting it in favour of more abstract deep-ken modes. The Far West eventually developed it four hundred years later and made the opposite choice (see Chapter 14). In China, Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) was aware of a plain-ken approach among Confucian scholars, but was unimpressed: “All they did was look things up in texts; they did not understand it for themselves; they did not come to understand that the sages’ sayings were inside them.” Indeed, Zhu Xi thought Confucius’s genius lay in removing the ugly corruptions from the texts he edited to create a canon applicable to readers throughout history.<sup>8</sup> His rival Lu Jiuyuan 陸九淵 (1139–92) refused to deface the Six Classics with plain-ken footnotes about the history of language; instead, he wrote, “the Six Classics annotate me.”<sup>9</sup> Even in the Near West, Islam had partly shifted towards the plain ken in textual scholarship long before Europe. From the Core, Asian perspective, the Far West plain-ken advance was a step backwards; from the Near West, Islamic perspective, it came centuries late. The above re-oriented map helps us see that this story need not be about Europe treading some new, pioneering path towards modernity. In some important ways, the Renaissance was a lateral step, or from the Core perspective even a backwards step, and a catching-up. This book is a defense of the non-West and the non-modern, not by asserting their almost-equivalence with the West and the modern, but by pointing out that the West rewrote, to its own advantage, the scales we use to evaluate societal progress.

8 朱熹, *朱子語類*, ed. 黎靖德 and 王星賢 (Beijing: 中华书局, 1986), 181: “亦只是一向去書冊上求,不就自家身上理會。自家見未到,聖人先說在那裏。”

9 陸九淵, *陸象山全集* (n.p.: 金谿槐堂, 1823), XXXIV, 7: “六經註我我註六經。” See John B. Henderson, *Scripture, Canon and Commentary: A Comparison of Confucian and Western Exegesis* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1991), 10, 28, 60; Lianbin Dai, “From Philology to Philosophy: Zhu Xi as a Reader-annotator,” in *Canonical Texts and Scholarly Practices: A Global Comparative Approach*, ed. Anthony Grafton and Glenn W. Most (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2016), 136–63.

## How to Read This Book

This overview is intended to efficiently give you a sense of the book and its possibilities. Written for multiple audiences, it assumes no expertise in any particular aspect of religious or fifteenth-century history. It is difficult to predict what brought you to the book, and what background and expectations came with you.

If your interests tend towards modern and traditional ways of thinking, you can read this book as making an argument: we can use the deep and plain kens to engage meaningfully with multiple fields of human activity, as demonstrated by Jesus-centric case studies from the fifteenth century. The kens, briefly introduced here, are more fully presented in Chapter 2, with additional appendices giving further theoretical background. Later chapters contain a variety of Jesus-centric examples to illustrate how the kens can be used; the more you read, the more prepared you will be to further develop them as a framework, either for scholarship or your day-to-day life.

Two introductory chapters tour the history of the development of the Christian, Muslim, and Manichaeic perspectives on Jesus (Chapter 3) and the variety of available Jesus sources from the long fifteenth century (Chapter 4). Three “Spaces” chapters explore places linked in various ways to Jesus (Chapter 5), the frontiers between Muslims and Christians in Anatolia, and between Christians and Jews in Iberia (Chapter 6), and the Jesus cult’s expansion into the margins of Eurasia and beyond (Chapter 7). In the “Tangibles” section, the materiality of Jesus links chapters on the power of relics and other objects (Chapter 8), the Eucharist’s edible Jesus and its liturgical context (Chapter 9), and Bibles and Qur’ans as physical things (Chapter 10). Shifting from the material to the mental, the “Ideas” section looks at how scholars interpreted those scriptures (Chapter 11), how difficult Jesus-problems made them relax their rules of knowledge (Chapter 12), and how the most prominent of these scholars, Nicholas of Cusa (1401–64), engaged with the idea of Jesus (Chapter 13). Three “Sights” chapters address the visual, considering how art oriented itself towards the deep (Chapter 14) and plain (Chapter 15) kens before examining a series of extraordinary Jesus images (Chapter 16). Turning towards the audible, a pair of “Sounds” chapters discuss the theory, practice, and power of language (Chapter 17) and elevated forms of speech and music (Chapter 18). The final “Orientations” section looks to people who modelled themselves on Jesus, or found Jesus-resemblance in others (Chapter 19), who cultivated an intimacy with him (Chapter 20), and who followed ethical guidelines extrapolated from his words and deeds (Chapter 21). Using sight, sound, touch, and thought as organizing principles underlines Jesus’s ubiquity in fifteenth-century life.

To help facilitate your exploration, the book ends with a glossary of new and important terms (Glossary), a short list of recent scholarship that has most informed this research (Select Bibliography), a list of manuscripts consulted (List of Manuscripts), and a general index (Index). Each source is fully cited in each chapter in which it is used.

Quotations from English sources have been modernized. Bible references use the New International Version; Qur'an citations refer to M. A. S. Abdel Haleem's translation.<sup>10</sup> I sometimes loosely refer to something as "plain ken" or "deep ken" to indicate its orientation towards that ken; strictly speaking, the kens themselves are the ways of viewing, not the things viewed. Transliterations have favoured accessibility and legibility over precision and consistency; certain key words are also given in the original. All translations are my own, unless otherwise specified. Readers keen to submerge deeper into the fifteenth century can follow the footnotes down into that wondrous abyss.

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<sup>10</sup> *The Qur'an*, trans. M. A. S. Abdel Haleem (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004).





## 2. The Two Kens

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定法ハ今日ノ不定法ナナリ

...yesterday's eternal truth is not the same as today's eternal truth.

—the Buddha (apocryphal)<sup>1</sup>

### Deep and Plain Kens

In English, the word “ken” refers to a sailor’s range of sight, or more loosely to anyone’s knowledge or perception. Something within one person’s ken may be outside another’s. That iceberg we are racing towards might be within the ken of a keen-eyed lookout, or “beyond the ken” of the myopic. More generally, we experience the world at our senses, and extrapolate it from patterns in those sense-contacts. The logic I use for that extrapolation might be different from the one you use.

In the course of researching this book, I noticed that many failures to see eye-to-eye, between two contemporaries in the fifteenth century, or between myself and some fifteenth-century person, could be explained by a difference in perspective. It was not that one party was smarter than the other, but that they saw and thought with different kens. In particular, two kens crystallized. I came to call them the plain ken and the deep ken.

What does the plain ken see? It perceives a world that is sparer, more minimalist: it finds a mess of particular things, a mess of human action. These messes occur in everyday spacetime, subject to its rules: every event can be located precisely with three spatial coordinates and a time stamp. God does not express his will by regularly interfering with the universe. There’s no deep meaning beyond what we happen to create. There’s no absolute knowledge beyond, or prior to, what is constructed in time. All that is now unknown can be systematically discovered; there are no hidden meanings that can be understood, much less manipulated. There’s no certainty. There’s no stability. The universe

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1 Dogen, *Karonsū, Nōgaku ronshū* 歌論集 能樂論集, Nihon Koten Bungaku Taikei 日本古典文学大系 65 (Tōkyō: Iwanami Shoten, Shōwa 33–41 [1958–66]), 456.

is contingent, accidental, and random. It is a universe so fluky that we have to rely on statistics and probabilities to make sense of it. The plain ken draws from an old Axial Age insight into the possibility of meaningful human action: a cause causes an effect. The plain-ken perspective works against the delusion that things, even truth and beauty, are permanent. Even permanence is merely an idea constructed in time.

What is the deep ken? The deep ken allows for all the things the plain ken denies. There is deep, subtle, and real meaning—and meaningful connections—beyond the accidental constructions by humans and the chance encounters of normal spacetime. There is at least the possibility of certainty and stability, for the deep ken is independent of time. A deep intentionality suffuses everything: the deep ken can be divine or universal, the perfect and unmediated expression of the will of God, or a reflection of the underlying order of the universe. There are subtle and powerful meanings, necessities, and connections, found especially in beauty and proportions, so uncanny as to be suspect to the plain-ken mind. Indeed, “*un-can-ny*”—“*un-ken-ny*”—literally means “beyond one’s ken”—here meaning beyond the plain ken.

The plain ken sees history happening haphazardly, without deep meaning, while the deep ken sees history happening meaningfully, with subtle and surprising consonances. We can use dimensions to distinguish between the kens. The plain ken sees a four-dimensional world: three spatial dimensions plus time. The deep ken takes this world and adds a fifth dimension, one of meaning, that connects events in spacetime via wormholes. One such wormhole might open between the execution of Jesus in first-century Palestine and an Easter mass ritual performed in, say, a Vancouver cathedral today. The deep ken is deeper than the plain, in both literal and figurative ways—space-collapsing wormholes create meaning. The plain ken is flatter than the deep ken: without wormholes, time is only fixed and linear, which makes history suddenly important as part of a chronological sequence; first-century Palestine was actually very far from twentieth-first-century Vancouver. Moving from a deep ken to a plain ken involves ignoring, or forgetting, what had been the most meaningful dimension.

Why “deep” and “plain”? Both these words were native to the period under discussion. Happily, English (as well as Latin and Sanskrit) takes words that refer to spatial depth (or lack thereof) and gives them figurative meanings related to depth of subtlety and complexity (or lack thereof). By 1400, “plain” (or “playne,” etc.) had both literal connotations (referring to flat, open land) and figurative connotations (indicating something easily understood or possessing simple meaning). John Wycliffe (ca. 1328–84) had described a Jesus story from the Gospels as “playen” or “pleyn,” in that it had a simple, clear, accessible

meaning.<sup>2</sup> “Deep” had both a literal and a figurative sense even earlier, as shown by examples in Old English: the Wessex Gospels had the Samaritan woman advise Jesus that her well is “deep” (Jn 4:11), and the Paris Psalter (BnF MS Lat. 8824, ca. 1050) rejoiced that God’s thoughts were extremely “deep” (Ps 92:5 [91:4]).<sup>3</sup>

Some caveats are useful. It is critical to resist any urge to consider the deep ken as spiritual or invisible, and the plain ken as mundane or visible. For now, we should refrain from making these associations.<sup>4</sup> Both kens allow for a powerful God. In the deep ken, God’s power creates the underlying order, with connections visible only to deep-ken eyes. In the plain ken, God’s power creates the potential for a variety of underlying orders, with more obvious connections. The plain ken creates a statistical space without a divine hand invariably, or even regularly, pulling strings.<sup>5</sup> A move into such a statistical space means the past, even when distant, is homogeneous. The deep ken admits the Crucifixion happens in time, but emphasizes its transcendence of time. The plain ken sees the Crucifixion as happening centuries ago, but on a day not unlike today.

I am not claiming that the deep and plain kens really exist as separate things in nature. Each ken assembles a number of facets that, to me, persuasively cohere with each other. The plain ken is just a name for the collection of attitudes we tend to bring to texts and images, and the deep ken comprises their opposites.

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- 2 John Wycliffe, *Select English Works*, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1869), I, 362 (sermon 105): “Þis gospel tellip a playen [variant reading “pleyn”] storie.” One translation (ca. 1398) of Bartholomaeus Anglicus uses “playne” in three senses: flat geometry, unwrinkled (heaven is “playne”), and clear in meaning. Bartholomaeus Anglicus, *On the Properties of Things*, trans. John Trevisa, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975), I, 337, 451, II, 1367.
  - 3 Benjamin Thorpe, ed., *Da Halgan Godspel on Englisc* (London: Rivington, 1842), 190; George Philip Krapp, ed., *The Paris Psalter and the Meters of Boethius* (New York: Columbia UP, 1932), 63.
  - 4 Alistair Cameron Crombie and, after him, Chunglin Kwa wrote about epistemological “styles.” Our deep ken and plain kens describe a lower level of knowing, perhaps a “vibe” of knowing. Although our plain ken and their statistical style have much in common, theirs starts in the eighteenth century, while aspects of ours are ancient. Crombie’s styles are postulation, experimental, hypothetical modelling, taxonomy, probabilistic and statistical analysis, and historical derivation. A. C. Crombie, *Styles of Scientific Thinking in the European Tradition* (London: Duckworth, 1994). Chunglin Kwa, *Styles of Knowing: A New History of Science from Ancient Times to the Present* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011) identifies the deductive, experimental, hypothetical-analogical, taxonomic, statistical, and evolutionary styles.
  - 5 Even in modern statistics some sense of divinity can be discerned in unexpected results: one popular statistics textbook describes outliers as “minor miracles.” David Freedman, Robert Pisani, and Roger Purves, *Statistics*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007), 102.

At times, historical reality defies the division between these two perspectives. A person, or even a culture, might be inclined more towards one than the other, but could certainly apply both, even simultaneously, to the same subject. Rather than viewing them as mutually exclusive, we might think of them as existing on a continuum. A single individual can think about spiritual matters with both kens. A deep-ken perspective does not exclude the plain ken, nor vice versa: in practice, each can contain elements of the other. Indeed, sometimes both occur equally and simultaneously to powerful effect. For example, traditional mainstream theories of the Qur'an understood that the meaning of any given word was arbitrary (plain ken) yet permanent (deep ken).<sup>6</sup>

The two kens have been useful to me: they have helped me understand how people thought about Jesus, and have helped me understand history. World history stops being a story of people vaguely getting smarter on the road to now—with acceleration during periods like the Renaissance and Enlightenment when intellectuals liked to write about how smart they were—and becomes a story of the rise and fall of deep-ken and plain-ken fashions in thinking.<sup>7</sup>

## Deep-ken Logics

We can listen in on a fifteenth-century sermon to better understand how the deep ken processes time. In the 1410s, a preacher was telling the court of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania about creation, when an audience member announced to the grand duke that he had caught the speaker in a lie: the preacher was not old enough to have witnessed creation. The monarch impatiently explained that creation, the start of the Jesus-centred plan of salvation, occurred 6600 years ago

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6 Robert M. Gleave, "Conceptions of the Literal Sense (zāhir, ḥaqīqa) in Muslim Interpretive Thought," in *Interpreting Scriptures in Judaism, Christianity and Islam: Overlapping Inquiries*, ed. Mordechai Z. Cohen and Adele Berlin (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2016), 183–203 (201).

7 Machiavelli is interested in deep-and-plain-ken issues, but proposes a different categorization, one more appropriate for his purposes. Machiavelli talks about the ephemeral "times and circumstances." He describes a universe "governed by fortune and by God," in contrast to a universe where humans act freely, and concludes that reality is halfway between the two universes. He links the first universe with chance (*governare alla sorte*), because, from the perspective of the heroic actor, both chance and God are random and out of control. In contrast, the deep ken sees a universe controlled by God, and the plain ken a random universe. Machiavelli takes both of those universes, notes that neither is under the control of humans, and concludes that effectively they're the same thing, for purposes of human agency. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, ed. Quentin Skinner and Russell Price (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1988), 84–86; Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, ed. Luigi Firpo (Turin: Einaudi, 1961), 92–94.

as a result of the divine order.<sup>8</sup> The grand duke listened with a deep ken, and the critic with a plain ken. The deep ken is not a lack of historical perspective, but an ability to make connections independent of linear time. One thirteenth-century chronicler described a Roman aristocrat attending Easter mass in the century before Jesus lived.<sup>9</sup> Deep-ken history is easy to mock. The medievalist E. H. Davenport sniffed that, “without exciting suspicion,” one medieval author “made his popes of the first and second centuries write in Frankish Latin of the ninth,” then “quote documents that had not yet been composed, and issue rulings on questions that had never yet arisen.”<sup>10</sup> More sympathetically, art historians Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood talk of “formal rhymes between historical events that revealed the pattern imposed on reality by divinity.”<sup>11</sup> The deep ken hears history rhyme.

Such nuanced, or wild, understandings of history are possible when God pulls the levers. Deep-ken connections make better sense when one believes in a divine “author.” In the deep ken, God follows Anton Chekhov’s (1860–1904) dramatic rule: “You cannot put a loaded gun on the stage if no one intends to fire it. You can’t make promises.”<sup>12</sup> That is, the playwright would not put a gun on the stage, or a word into scripture, unless it was meaningful. An insignificant thing placed significantly is, in effect, a broken promise. God does not promise in vain. (For more on the deep ken and divine authorship, see Appendix B.)

## Plain-ken Logics

The fifteenth century witnessed a renewed interest in the particular circumstances critical for the plain ken. Such details, including time and place, were of fundamental importance in ancient rhetoric and jurisprudence, as, for example, in the determination of legal penalties.<sup>13</sup> Niccolò Machiavelli

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- 8 Jan Długosz, ed., *Annales seu cronicae incliti regni Poloniae*, 12 vols. (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2000), XI, 24–25.
  - 9 This is Belisae, the wife of Lucius Sergius Catilina (ca. 108–62 BC). Ricordano Malispini, *Storia Fiorentina*, 3 vols. (Livorno: Glauco Masi, 1830), I, 31. See Patricia J. Osmond, “Catiline in Fiesole and Florence: The After-Life of a Roman Conspirator,” *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* (2000) 7: 3–38 (24), <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02689199>
  - 10 E. H. Davenport, *The False Decretals* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1916), 68–69.
  - 11 Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance* (New York: Zone, 2010), 10–11.
  - 12 А. П. Чехов, *Полное собрание сочинений и писем*, 30 vols. (Moscow: Nauka, 1976), III, 273–75: “Нельзя ставить на сцене заряженное ружье, если никто не имеет в виду выстрелить из него. Нельзя обещать.”
  - 13 Cicero, *On Invention*, trans. H. M. Hubbell, Loeb Classical Library 386 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1949), 200–01 (2.39); Cicero, *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, trans.

(1469–1527) spoke of the “quality of the times” (*qualità dei tempi*), and insisted that leaders needed to adapt themselves to circumstances, just as judges needed to consider circumstances in adjudicating the law.<sup>14</sup> Francesco Guicciardini (1483–1540), in turn, criticized Machiavelli for making gross generalizations that ignored how circumstances change “according to the times and other occurrences.”<sup>15</sup> One anonymous treatise from Bohemia (ca. 1400), representing mainstream views, asserted that “our cognition originates from our senses, through which we move from the particular to the universal, from the visible to the invisible.”<sup>16</sup> The theologian Robert Ciboule (d. 1458) emphasized the particularity of knowledge: “In any good knowledge there is nothing that does not serve in its time and in its place.” Ciboule’s best example of this was Jesus, who “often preached in simple language and with parables of common things.”<sup>17</sup> Coming from another direction, in the context of music theory, the French theologian Jean Le Munerat (fl. 1490s) saw knowledge as conditioned by time: he cited usage and classical philosophers, for “our lords the jurists, in fact, say that usage or habit is a certain law.”<sup>18</sup> Much of this interest indeed drew from ancient thought. Cicero (106–43 BC), for example, noted that Sophocles’s (ca. 497/96–406/05 BC) comment on the attractiveness of a passer-by was inappropriate in a business meeting, but would have been fine during a sports event, “so great is the significance of both place and circumstance.”<sup>19</sup>

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Harry Caplan, Loeb Classical Library 403 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1954), 66–67 (2.6); *Institutiones and Digesta*, ed. Paul Krueger and Theodor Mommsen, Corpus iuris civilis 1 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1889), 815 (Dig. 48.19.16.1).

- 14 Peter Burke, “Context in Context,” in Burke, *Secret History and Historical Consciousness* (Brighton: EER, 2016 [2002]), 185; Ian Maclean, *Interpretation and Meaning in the Renaissance* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1992), 81–82.
- 15 Francesco Guicciardini, “Considerazioni sui Discorsi del Machiavelli,” in *Opere inedite*, ed. Piero e Luigi Guicciardini, 8 vols. (Florence: Barbera, Bianchi e Comp., 1857), I, 52.
- 16 *Augustiniani cuiusdam tractatus contra errores Mathiae de lanov*, ed. Jan Sedlák, in *M. Jan Hus* (Prague: Dědictví sv. Prokopa, 1915), 21\*–44\* (26\*). See Pavel Kalina, “Cordium penetrativa: An Essay on Iconoclasm and Image Worship around the Year 1400,” *Umění: časopis Ústavu dějin umění Akademie věd České republiky* 43 (1995): 247–57.
- 17 Robert Ciboule, *Livre très utile de sainte méditation* (Louvain: Bergangne, 1556), 18–19.
- 18 Don Harrán, *In Defense of Music: The Case for Music as Argued by a Singer and Scholar of the Late Fifteenth Century* (Lincoln, NE: 1989), 88.
- 19 Cicero, *On Duties* [*De officiis*], trans. Walter Miller, Loeb Classical Library 30 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2015), 146–47 (1.6).

The plain ken is interested in what has been called the “pastness of the past.”<sup>20</sup> For centuries, forgers of documents were so relaxed about that pastness that they practised their craft without attention to the appearance of history. The Renaissance renewed an interest in the past as past. Petrarch (1304–74) was interested in antique coins and costume. The painter Jacopo Bellini’s (ca. 1400–70) obsession with classical coins and epigraphs is shown in the many copies he made of them. History fascinated fellow painter Andrea Mantegna (ca. 1431–1506), who befriended antiquarians. Mantegna and Bellini both put classical details in their compositions to indicate a historical setting.<sup>21</sup>

Already in our period some thinkers had a plain-ken sense of how religion itself developed, and decayed, in time. Polydore Vergil (ca. 1470–1555) argued that early humans “did highly advance [to] their first Kings honour and praise; and by the persuasion of the Devil [...] magnified them as gods.”<sup>22</sup> Pietro Pomponazzi (1462–1525) noted that even miracles were subject to decay: Jupiter’s name was once powerful, but no longer; Jesus’s name can cure disease now, but will not always.<sup>23</sup> (See Appendix B.)

## Space in the Two Kens

In the plain ken, spacetime is contiguous and homogeneous (see Fig. 2.1). If Jesus at his birth held one end of a rope (Mary could help him if that’s beyond his ability), I could take up the other as I write this here and now (49.3 N, 123.3 W, 66 feet, 2024 AD). If I wanted to get closer to Jesus, I could follow this rope. We could divide this rope into ten equal lengths, corresponding to ten ‘steps’. Step 1 would put me on the Missouri River in central Montana, Assiniboine territory, in 1821, sixteen years after the Lewis and Clark Expedition passed

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20 Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2008), 239, <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9781107051126>

21 Peter Burke, *The Renaissance Sense of the Past* (New York: St. Martin, 1970), 12–13, 21–24; Fritz Saxl, “Jacopo Bellini and Mantegna as Antiquarians,” in Saxl, *Lectures* (Nendeln: Kraus Reprint, 1978), 150–60. See Donald R. Kelley, “The Theory of History,” in *Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, ed. Charles B. Schmitt and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1988), 746–61; Maren Elisabeth Schwab and Anthony Grafton, *The Art of Discovery: Digging into the Past in Renaissance Europe* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2022), 10–40, <https://doi.org/10.1353/book.109177>

22 Polydore Vergil, *De rerum inventoribus* [1499], trans. John Langley (New York: Agathynian Club, 1868), 17 (1.5).

23 Pietro Pomponazzi, *Trattato sull’immortalita dell’ anima: Il libro degli incantesimi* [1520], trans. Italo Toscani (Rome: Galileo Galilei, 1914), 255–60. See Marco Bertozzi, “Il fatale ritmo della storia: La teoria delle grandi congiunzioni astrali tra XV e XVI secolo,” *I Castelli di Yale* 1 (1996): 29–49.



through. Step 2 falls on the western edge of the Great Lakes, Fox and Ojibwe lands, in 1618, and Step 3 on the eastern edge of those Lakes, in 1416, just as the Onondaga were beginning to confederate. Steps 4 through 7 skip across the medieval Atlantic, where we might catch a glimpse of voyaging Indigenous Americans, Norsemen, Gaels, Muslim Iberians, or perhaps sea serpents. Steps 8 and 9 pick a path through a tottering late Roman Empire in northern Africa, and with Step 10 we reach Jesus at his birth.



Fig. 2.1 Vancouver to Bethlehem through Spacetime, map by Taf Richards, Arcane Atlas Cartography (@Arcane\_Atlas), CC BY-NC.

Such a journey illustrates what it means to navigate the contiguous, homogeneous spacetime of the plain ken. There may be obstacles against travelling through space and time to see Jesus—border crossings, a vast ocean, our physical inability to travel backwards in time—but the idea is conceivable and straightforward. When calculating the intermediary points, no doubts arose as to whether they could exist in spacetime at all. This is a natural world, where humans live their lives, dramatic and ordinary, sitting, standing, defecating, building, playing, killing, dying, and perhaps helping their baby hold one end of a historian’s rope. People have various languages and cultures that they find meaning in, languages and cultures that themselves move through spacetime, evolving as they go. The view from one point in spacetime might be very different from another, but the two points are fundamentally of the same sort. This is the way that most professional historians today think about the world, most of the time.

Where the plain ken is dry, the deep ken is saturated with meaning. In the plain ken, a given point might have personal significance to you, or it may have some historical or geographical meaning—but that meaning is projected onto it. Nazareth, a city in Israel where Jesus grew up, sits at 32.703 N latitude. If a pianist played  $C_1$ , the third white key from the leftmost end of the piano keyboard, a hammer would make a string vibrate 32.703 times a second. In the plain ken, this coincidence is coincidental, and any attempt to find significance in it is idiotic: both measurement systems, of latitude and of frequency, are

arbitrarily and historically constructed. In the deep ken, spacetime is imbued with significance, and this coincidence might dramatically bridge space and sound, perhaps, as here, through numbers. An event happens at a time and place necessarily and significantly; it could not have occurred otherwise.

If you want to get closer to Jesus, in the deep-ken sense, you do not move back in time and directionally towards Bethlehem. Instead, you go to a mosque or a church—especially the one in Prague named “Bethlehem.” You develop a reverent mind-state. You behave ethically, in imitation of Jesus’s behaviour. You recruit eleven other people to spend the day with your Bolivian friend Jesús, in imitation of Jesus and his twelve disciples. You move forward in time until Christmas arrives. You move forward in time until the number of years between you and the year of Jesus’s birth is beautiful—we just passed 2000, which is gorgeous, and will have to wait patiently until 2100, which is still pretty. Plain-ken historians might point out that we know neither the year nor the calendar day of Jesus’s birth, that December 25 was chosen arbitrarily and the calendar was, they estimate, four years off. Deep-ken historians would reply that this misses the point entirely.

Because space is saturated with meaning, “close” signifies something beyond the mere physical proximity that the plain ken recognizes (see Fig. 2.2). Although music follows natural rules independent of human perspective, we can use music as a metaphor to better understand how some deep-ken logic works. Consider that piano keyboard: playing two adjacent keys creates an especially dissonant sound, an interval called a minor second. Playing two keys separated by exactly eleven others creates an especially consonant sound, an octave. The first pair of notes are as physically proximate as possible; they are near in the plain ken. The second pair of notes are a hand-span apart physically, but in some deeper, meaningful way are even “closer” than the first pair—they “consonate” with each other. This is possible because musical space has a cyclical quality: start with any note, and as you move up the scale consonant sounds will occur at regular intervals. Our calendar also has cyclical qualities. Sunday occurs every seven days, and Christmas comes every 365 days.<sup>24</sup> The deep ken might see 25 December 2024 as closer to all the December 25ths than to 26 December 2024. (See Appendix C, Example 1).

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24 Or 366 days, exceptionally, to take in account the failure of astronomy to live up to the beauty of the mathematical system.



Fig. 2.2 Vancouver to Bethlehem via Wormhole. Flyazure (2023), CC BY-NC.

## Coincidence in the Two Kens

The most decisive way to distinguish between the two kens is to place in front of them a coincidence, a concurrence of two things without obvious connection between them. “Coincidence” comes from the Latin for “falling together.” We might ask the two kens, did these two things *just happen* to fall together—or were they *put* together?

The plain ken sees coincidences merely as coincidence, random and accidental. The world is contingent. Any happening could easily have been otherwise. The universe and its history are messy. A coincidence, by definition, has no causal connection compelling it. The two things just happened to fall together. At best, if they were put together, they were put together intentionally by humans. If something strange happens, we might reasonably look for a set-up, for the hidden camera recording our reaction.

The deep ken sees a secret choreography, explanations beyond those visible to the plain ken. Open to the world’s hidden necessary relationships, it recognizes that coincidences might have causal connections beyond mere coincidence. Events that the plain ken would dismiss as meaningless can have beauty and significance in the deep ken. Many divination processes have their basis in this deep-ken outlook. The position of the planets at your birth has meaning decodable by the skilled.

This meaningfulness is possible because a powerful God with intentions, or a network of subtle natural laws with their own logic, runs the show. Just as a plain ken can see a meaningful coincidence in an author’s novel or prank video, so too can a deep ken find a meaningful coincidence in a universe authored, or pranked, by some powerful intelligence. G. K. Chesterton (1874–1936) referred to coincidences as “a spiritual sort of puns.”<sup>25</sup> The deep ken sees the

<sup>25</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *Irish Impressions* (London: Collins, 1919), 202–03.

universe in narrative terms, as something authored, complete with symbolism, foreshadowing, literary-like motifs, and word play.

Consider how the two kens makes sense of language. In the deep ken, reality is saturated with meaning, and is interdependent with meaning. Language is a way to access that meaning. For a century, punsters have pointed out that “you can tune a piano, but you can’t tuna fish.”<sup>26</sup> The deep ken might take this seriously, holding that if the words “tune” and “tuna” have a connection (which you can see and hear), then there may well also be a connection between the things they signify, namely adjusting a musical instrument and a large saltwater fish. We tend to think about language with the plain ken, so this is ridiculous. These words have these meanings as a result of historical processes. “Tune” comes, via the Latin *tonus* (tensing a rope), and Greek *τόνος* *tónos* (rope), from the Proto-Indo-European *\*tón-os* (stretch); “tuna” comes, via the Spanish *atún*, the Arabic *تُون* *tunn*, the Latin *thunnus*, and the Greek *θύννος* *thúnnos* from either the Hebrew *תָּנִין* *thinn* (snake) or the Greek *θύνω*, the co-incidence in modern English of “tune” and “tuna” is pure coincidence, the result of a long, accidental, and haphazard chain of linguistic shifts. None of these centuries of innovative or careless speakers of English, Latin, Greek, or Proto-Indo-European were setting up a joke for twentieth-century vaudeville—but from a deep-ken perspective, God or the universe might well have arranged it all for precisely that purpose. A subtle network of hard-wired meaning permeates deep-ken space, connecting fish to words to instruments to places to times, and to Jesus.

A plain ken might dismiss something only visible to the deep ken as speculative and nonsensical. A deep ken might dismiss something visible to the plain ken as trivial and meaningless. Speaking to someone who sees things you do not can be frustrating. Indeed, recognizing connections or patterns or significance in the world that are not recognized by others has been, and continues to be, associated with mental illness. German psychiatry coined two relevant words: the recognition of meaning in indirect connections as “apophanie,” a cousin of “epiphany,” but modified by *ἀπο-* *apo-* (away from) to mean its opposite,<sup>27</sup> and “pareidolia,” a cousin of “eidola”—images or representations—but modified by *παρά-* *para-* (alongside, contrary to) to mean incorrect images, like seeing a man’s face in the moon’s craters.<sup>28</sup>

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26 The earliest known variation is “You may be able to run the scales on a salmon, but you can’t tuna fish.” *Bill Johnston’s Second Joy Book*, ed. William T. Johnston (New York: D. Appleton, 1925), 234.

27 K. Conrad, *Die beginnende Schizophrenie* (Stuttgart: Thieme, 1966), 157.

28 K. Kahlbaum, “Die verschiedenen Formen der Sinnesdelirien,” *Centralblatt für die medicinischen Wissenschaften* 3 (1865): 890–93, 910.

The first use of the word “shit,” referring to cattle diarrhea, belongs to an anonymous medieval English farmer with a poetic inclination. By the sixteenth century, “shit” had generalized to refer to any kind of excrement, and could be used to describe a bad person. By the middle of the twentieth century, “shit” had become fully generalized, without any necessary fecal connotation. The word “happens” also has medieval origins, but in the nineteenth century took on a sense of randomness: one could say that something “just happens,” without reason. To the best of our knowledge, it was a black teenager in San Francisco in the early 1960s who first smithed together these two evolving words: “That shit,” referring to police brutality, “happens all the time.” By the 1980s, “shit happens” had an almost philosophical force, beyond police misconduct or anything specific. With its sense of randomness and meaninglessness, “shit happens” could serve as a motto for the plain ken.<sup>29</sup> Theodoric Vrie (fl. 1410s), a friar at the Council of Constance (1414–18) conceptualized a five-stage history of the papacy, from an age of gold, to silver, to iron, to mud, and finally and currently to dung (*stercus*), in which Rome sits as “that dreadful pope crucifies my groom,” Jesus.<sup>30</sup> With his deep ken, Vrie conceptualized the dissonance between first-century Jesus and fifteenth-century popes as a decline from a meaningfully ordered age of gold to his own age of dung—one best understood with the plain ken.

Thomas Aquinas (1225–74) recognized something like our two kens and placed them in a hierarchy: his plain-ken equivalent was inferior to the deep ken. For Aquinas, what appeared accidental to the plain ken was in fact providential to the more subtle deep ken: “Nothing prohibits that certain things are fortuitous [*fortuita*] or casual [*casualia*], in comparison to proximate causes—but not in comparison to Divine Providence, for thus nothing is at random [*temere*] in the world.”<sup>31</sup> While their proximate causes might be random, in terms of divine providence nothing was accidental. In 1277, the theology faculty of Paris condemned the idea that God could make a mortal immortal, because it did not consonate with this deep-ken nexus of reality, logic, and truth. Thus, a deep ken could be applied to human experience that allowed subtle, trained thinkers to find consonance between reality, logic, and theological truths. This was a tight, integrated system.

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29 Anonymous teenager quoted in Carl Shear Werthman, “Delinquency and Authority” (MA thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 1964), 121. Perhaps the teenager was drawing from a knowledge of medieval Islamic philosophy: the skeptic Al-Ghazali’s (ca. 1058–1111) example of a random happening was a book transforming into horse defecating in his library. See Appendix B.

30 Theodoric Vrie, “Historia Concilii Constantiensis,” in *Magnum Oecumenicum Constantiense Concilium*, ed. Hermann von der Hardt, 6 vols. (Helmstadt: Schnorius, 1697), I, col. 11.

31 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologica*, I, q. 116, art. 1.

Imagine a gambler at a slot machine, whose first ninety-nine attempts at a jackpot have all failed. If he were “superstitious,” his optimism might leap at the next attempt: he might see some magic in the number one hundred, and feel that the machine, after so long a drought, is “ripe” for a win. Experts are so unimpressed by this kind of logic that they came up with a name for it: the “gambler’s fallacy.” All the “laws” of probability and statistics assert, and assume, that the events under consideration are independent from each other. The odds of success at the hundredth attempt are fully independent of all preceding attempts. Although the plain ken does not object to the possibility of a rigged machine, or of its inner mechanism acquiring a bias through repeated use, in this example it does insist on the independence of events. The deep ken, however, sees hidden dependencies invisible to the plain ken, and so these “laws” of probability and statistics no longer apply. In the deep ken, God or the universe may take pity on the gambler ninety-nine times unlucky.<sup>32</sup> (See Appendix C, Examples 2–4.)

## Overview of Jesus between the Kens

This chapter closes with a table that focuses on Jesus in the context of the two kens. This table presents the answers each ken would give to a series of ten questions representative of the book’s major themes. Theories of learning and student feedback suggest that quizzing yourself by coming up with answers before checking mine is an efficient way to consolidate your understanding of the kens, and perhaps identify where our understandings differ.

|   | DEEP KEN   | PLAIN KEN   |
|---|--|---|
| Is it okay to translate scripture into a vernacular language? | No. There are deep, meaningful connections between the words in the holy language and the things they represent. Jesus died on a <i>crux</i> , not on a <i>cross</i> . | Yes. Latin and Arabic words are, like English words, created by humans in time. All these words are merely approximations of the things they represent. |

32 When experts insist that luck or ripeness “does not happen” (e.g., Leonard Mlodinow, *Drunkard’s Walk: How Randomness Rules Our Lives* (New York: Pantheon, 2009), 101), they are asserting assumed mathematical laws or empirical observations over a larger period of time (over a “sample space”), which is not relevant to a single case of gambler who has a good or bad relation with luck. In fact, *it has happened* that a long string of failures is followed by a success at a symbolic moment—and that has been observed, and noted for future strategy.

|  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| <p>Should a priest celebrating mass wear expensive vestments?</p>  | <p>Yes. The richness of the clothing consonates with the truth and power of the ritual. Decorum optimizes the meaning of the ritual.</p>  | <p>No. Clothing has no essential meaning. The obvious, accessible meaning is Jesus's explicit and verbal embrace of poverty. If you want to find meaning in Jesus, listen to what he says—the meanings he's trying to convey—not what he does.</p>  |
| <p>Does the cross shape have power?</p>  | <p>Yes. There is a deep-meaning connection between the cross hanging on a necklace and the cross on which Jesus died.</p>   | <p>No. A cross is just two pieces of wood. Any power it has is psychological and emotional, in the minds of individuals.</p>  |
| <p>Should a fifteenth-century Italian painter depict Jesus to look like a fifteenth-century Italian? Should the painting's background look like fifteenth-century Italy?</p> | <p>Yes. Jesus was not a fifteenth-century Italian, but was equally relevant to every time period. It is best to ignore the historical particulars and depict the true, timeless Jesus in a way that is itself timeless.</p> | <p>No. Jesus was a first-century Palestinian, and should be depicted to look like a first-century Palestinian in first-century Palestine.</p>   |
| <p>Is the Old Testament still relevant to Christians?</p>  | <p>Yes. The Old Testament is the timeless word of God. Its prophets literally made references to the future Incarnation of Jesus.</p>   | <p>It has become far less relevant. The Old Testament writers, existing before Jesus, could not be literally writing about Jesus, because of the rules of normal spacetime. Religious truth naturally changes during the course of history, and so the New Testament has come to replace the Old.</p> |
| <p>In a Muslim perspective, is the Gospel still relevant?</p>  | <p>(Christians may have approached this question with the deep ken—but mostly from a Christian perspective; Muslims did not.)</p>   | <p>No. The Gospels were incorrectly transmitted, with human error, through history, and so cannot be relied upon.</p>   |

|  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| <p>Should music communicate clearly to humans?</p>                     | <p>No. Music’s purpose is to consonate with the divine order of the universe.</p>  | <p>Yes, the purpose of music is to communicate, both verbally through lyrics and musically through the music itself—through word painting, through the replication of human emotion. Music has degraded through time, and we should restore it to its original clarity.</p>   |
| <p>Can we be certain, about, e.g., morals?</p>                         | <p>Perhaps. There’s at least the possibility of stable knowledge that we have access to through careful study of subtle meaning.</p>   | <p>No. Knowledge is constructed in history, and therefore is not stable enough to give us certainty. At best, we can have a pragmatic “moral” (99.9999...%) certainty.</p>  |
| <p>How should we synthesize the gospels?</p>                           | <p>That an event was repeated in multiple gospels may have deep meaning. If three gospels report that Jesus did an action, he may have done that action three times. Because God inspired precisely four gospels, we should instead look for deeper meaning within each of them.</p> | <p>Jesus’s life took place in everyday spacetime, and his life was recorded by human authors themselves living in everyday spacetime. It is highly likely there’s duplication in the record, as it was haphazardly compiled. Still, each one is a unique historical artifact, and we need to evaluate each on its one terms in order to understand their (dis)continuities.</p> |
| <p>If God ordered you to do something immoral, what should you do?</p> | <p>This is a trick question: God (who consonates perfectly with the Good and Moral) cannot order an immoral act. A God-ordered immoral act makes as much sense as a “colourless green idea.”</p>   | <p>This is a trick question: nothing is inherently “immoral.” Morality is constructed by God in time, as he makes decisions and commandments. Something ordered by God is, necessarily, moral.</p>  |

Table 2.1 Jesus between the Kens.





# 3. The Development of the Jesus Cult

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The most important process in the world history of religion was the rise of the monotheistic cult of Yahweh, one of the oldest names for the god of Jews, Christians, and Muslims. Who is Yahweh? Our earliest records suggest a perception of him as a war or weather god in northern Arabia. Around the sixth century BC, sources indicated a new realization of him as the only god, or the only true god.<sup>1</sup> It is beyond the ability of historians to argue whether this reflects a change in the nature of Yahweh or merely a change in human understanding of Yahweh.

This monotheistic cult of Yahweh grew over the centuries. A series of prophets guided the understanding of Yahweh, and disagreements over whether to accept each teacher's new interpretations caused divisions. The first major Yahweh cult was the Jews, with their prophets' revelations codified in scriptures called the Tanakh, the Hebrew Bible. The first-century Rabbi Yeshua, the focus of this book, gave teachings recorded in Greek-language texts called gospels. As the Yahweh cult travelled through time, space, and languages, Yeshua has been called dozens of names. Today, Arabic's importance to Islam means that two billion Muslims know Yeshua as Isa, globally his most prevalent name, and only a billion English-speakers know him as Jesus.

Who was Jesus? Who believed what about Jesus? The Christian gospels report that this was an open question even during his own lifetime. When he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" they could not give a single answer: John the Baptist, or Elijah, or one of the prophets. Jesus was in no hurry to control his own press, and "sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him."<sup>2</sup>

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- 1 Mark S. Smith, *The Early History of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002); Thomas Römer, *The Invention of God*, trans. Raymond Geuss (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2015), <https://doi.org/10.4159/9780674915732>
  - 2 Mt 16:13–20; Mk 8:27–30; Lk 9:18–21.

The confusion about Jesus during his own lifetime increased dramatically after his death. Emerging from the Jewish cult of Yahweh, within its first six centuries the cult of Jesus fractured into the three subcults, each founded by a messenger whose teachings included a unique perspective on Jesus’s nature and importance (see Fig. 3.1). Paul’s followers became known as Christians, Mani’s as Manichaeans, and Muhammad’s as Muslims. Each branch of the Jesus cult had its particularities, but, when seen from outside, were cousins in their beliefs and practices.

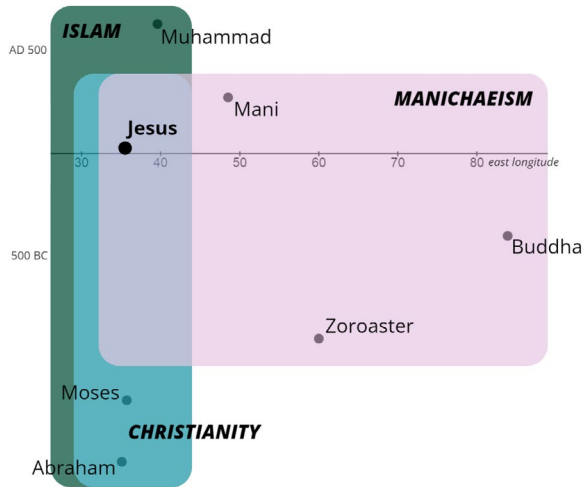


Fig. 3.1 Prophets and Subcults. The prophets are arranged vertically from oldest (Abraham) to most recent (Muhammad), and horizontally from west (the Muslim prophets) to east (Shakyamuni Buddha). Each box shows the prophets of a single subcult. Created by Luke Clossey (2023), CC BY-NC.

Of course, the idea that the Jesus cult existed as a single entity is a construct found only in the mind of the historian looking back; the diversity here was extreme, and one group of cultists might have been hard pressed to recognize their Jesus in another group’s Jesus. In the same way, Buddha enthusiasts in Late Traditional Sri Lanka would have been surprised by any links to contemporary Buddha enthusiasts in Japan—was that really the same person?

In 1400, most people in the Far and Near West and in the Indic Core—roughly half of humanity—were in a position to have acquired substantial knowledge about Jesus. How close could they have come to a consensus about him? Although they had sharp divergences of opinion on some crucial details, Christians and Muslims—who between them made up 99% of the Jesus cult in 1400—shared a common basic understanding of the life story of Jesus.

We do face the problem of knowing who, of how many people, had access to which information. The Christians combined four gospels with other documents to form the New Testament, in contrast to the Jewish Tanakh, which they called the Old Testament. Together Old and New Testaments made up the Bible, the Old still authoritative but reinterpreted in light of the New. Six centuries later, Muhammad revealed the revelations made to him as the Qur'an. He explained that the Christian Gospel had been distorted in transmission: Jesus was in fact not Yahweh, but merely an important prophet and saint. Beyond these canonical texts, both major subcults would have had access, to varied and uncertain degrees, to extra-canonical information called "apocrypha" (from the Greek word for "hidden" or "obscure"). Unofficial gospels featured prominently in the Christian apocrypha, and remembered sayings of Muhammad in the Muslim apocrypha, and Jesus moved between both.

We will first look at a life of Jesus supported by both canons—and thus likely known to almost all Jesus cultists. We will then add details supported by one subcult's canon and the other's apocrypha—and thus likely known to a small majority of Jesus cultists. Finally, we will look at Jesus knowledge unique to single traditions.

### Convergences in Canon

The poet William Langland (ca. 1332–86) was struck by the similarity of Islam and Christianity, a similarity founded on monotheism:

For Saracens have somewhat seeming [similar] to our belief,  
 For they love and believe in one [Lord] almighty;  
 And we, learned and lewed [lay], believe in one god.<sup>3</sup>

Muslims looking in the opposite direction might have struggled to find monotheism in Christian belief in a divine Trinity, consisting of Yahweh, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. However, the majority of the people in 1400 who knew about Jesus at all would agree on the following basic narrative supported by both the Christian and Muslim canons. I use some Arabic names, likely the best known at the time, with English equivalents for reference.

Zakariya (Zechariah), advanced in years, wanted a successor, but his wife was barren. Allah (Yahweh) promised him a son, Yahya (John), who would become a prophet.<sup>4</sup> When Zakariya expressed some doubt, he became mute, but

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3 *Piers Plowman*, Text B, Passus XV, lines 392–94.

4 Lk 1:11–14; Qur'an 3:37–39, 19:1–15.

did indeed become a father.<sup>5</sup> Yahya thus paved the way for Isa (Jesus), even in his doubt-defying miraculous birth.

Allah then sent one or more angels to tell Miriam (Mary) that she had been chosen above all women: she would have a son named Isa.<sup>6</sup> Miriam, incredulous, protested that she was a chaste virgin, and was reassured that Allah could nevertheless make this birth happen, and indeed Isa was born.<sup>7</sup> People shared their own doubts about her virgin birth, but these concerns were resolved, either by an angel or by the newborn Isa himself speaking up for his mother.<sup>8</sup> If Isa was not precocious enough to teach at birth, he certainly did by the time he visited the Jerusalem temple at age twelve.<sup>9</sup>

Thus began Isa's career of preaching the Gospel. Isa confirmed the truth of the Torah, the Jewish Law, but he also emended it by authorizing, or doing himself, some things that it had forbidden.<sup>10</sup> He was a prophet and *al-masih* (messiah, "Christ").<sup>11</sup> Isa announced the coming of a "something," which Muslims would identify as Muhammad and Christians as the Holy Ghost.<sup>12</sup> Isa was a sign, was sent with signs, and carried out signs.<sup>13</sup> Some of these signs were his miracles: he performed impossible feats of food production.<sup>14</sup> He cured lepers and the blind, and even resurrected the human dead.<sup>15</sup>

Isa's teachings and miracles incited opposition and mocking.<sup>16</sup> Some believed he was crucified through the plots of the Jews. However, although people disbelieved Isa and schemed against him, Yahweh remained, in the words of the Qur'an, the "Best of Schemers."<sup>17</sup> Thus Isa survived the Crucifixion, either because the death was an illusion, or because Yahweh restored him to life.<sup>18</sup> Yahweh then raised Isa to Himself.<sup>19</sup>

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5 Lk 1:18–22; Qur'an 19:10.

6 Mt 1:18–21; Lk 1:26–38; Qur'an 3:42–43.

7 Qur'an 2:87, 2:253.

8 Mt 1:19; Qur'an 19:27–33.

9 Lk 2:41–52.

10 Mt 5:17; Mk 2:26, Mk 7:5; Lk 6:4; Qur'an 3:49, 5:46, 61:6.

11 "Messiah" occurs eleven times in the Qur'an, only in reference to Jesus.

12 Jn 15:26; Qur'an 61:6.

13 Lk 11:30; Qur'an 2:87, 2:253, 43:63. For example, in Jn 2, 12.

14 Mt 14:13–21, Mt 15:32–16:10; Mk 6:31–44, Mk 8:1–9; Lk 5:1–11, 9:10–17; Jn 2:1–11, Jn 6:5–15; Qur'an 5:112–15.

15 Mt 8:1–4, Mt 9:27–31, Mt 20:29–34; Mk 1:40–45, Mk 5:21–43, Mk 8:22–26, Mk 10:46–52; Lk 5:12–16, Lk 7:11–19, Lk 18:35–43; Jn 9:1–12, Jn 11:1–44; Qur'an 3:49.

16 Qur'an 43:57–60.

17 Qur'an 3:54.

18 Mt 27–28; Mk 15–16; Lk 23–24; Jn 19–20; Qur'an 4:156–57.

19 Qur'an 4:158. Qur'an 4:159 suggests that Jesus will be a witness at Resurrection Day. See Mt 25:31–36.

## Convergences in Apocrypha

To this account entirely contained in both canons, we can add a secondary layer of information that was in one canon but only in the apocrypha of the other. Information in this layer would have been known by most Jesus cultists—that is, the half of the cult whose canon testified to it, plus anyone in the other subcult who happened across similar apocryphal information.<sup>20</sup>

Some passages included in the Qur'an were echoed by the Christian apocrypha, and, if we think with the plain ken, might derive from it. Before Jesus's birth, men cast lots to determine who would take charge of the young Mary. Zechariah won, with Yahweh miraculously providing her with food.<sup>21</sup> After the birth, Yahweh gave Mary a stream of potable water and a palm tree of ripe dates. In the Christian version the Baby Jesus commanded these things to happen, but in the Qur'an Mary had to shake the palm tree herself.<sup>22</sup> The

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- 20 Martin Accad, "The Gospels in the Muslim Discourse of the Ninth to the Fourteenth Centuries: An Exegetical Inventorial Table," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 14 (2003): 67–91, 204–20, 337–52, 459–79, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09596410305261>; Michel Hayek, *Le Christ de l'Islam* (Paris: Seuil, 1959); Mahmoud Ayyoub, "Towards an Islamic Christology, 2: The Death of Jesus—Reality or Illusion?" *The Muslim World* 10 (1980): 91–121; Tarif Khalidi, "The Role of Jesus in Intra-Muslim Polemics of the First Two Islamic Centuries," in *Christian Arabic Apologetics during the Abbasid Period, 750–1258*, ed. Samir Khalil Samir and Jørgen S. Nielsen (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 146–56; Oddbjørn Leirvik, *Images of Jesus Christ in Islam: Introduction, Survey of Research, Issues of Dialogue* (Uppsala: Swedish Institute of Missionary Research, 1998); Suleiman A. Mourad, "On the Qur'anic Stories About Mary and Jesus," *Bulletin of the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies* 1 (1999): 13–24; Suleiman A. Mourad, "Jesus According to Ibn 'Asakir," in *Ibn 'Asakir and Early Islamic History*, ed. James E. Lindsay (Princeton, NJ: The Darwin Press, 2001), 24–43; Thomas O'Shaughnessy, *The Koranic Concept of the Word of God* (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1940); Neal Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity* (London: Macmillian, 1991); Jacques Jomier, "Quatre ouvrages en arabe sur le Christ," *Mélanges de l'Institut Dominicain d'Etudes Orientales du Caire* 5 (1958): 367–86; Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Qur'an and the Bible: Text and Commentary* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2018).
- 21 Qur'an 3:37–44; Wilhelm Schneemelcher, ed., "Protoevangelium of James," in *The New Testament Apocrypha*, rev. ed., trans. R. McL. Wilson, 2 vols. (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2005), I, 421–38.
- 22 Qur'an 19:23–26; "Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew," in Schneemelcher, ed., *New Testament Apocrypha*, I, 463; Suleiman A. Mourad, "From Hellenism to Christianity and Islam: The Origin of the Palm-tree Story Concerning Mary and Jesus in the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew and the Qur'an," *Oriens Christianus* 86 (2002): 206–16. Tradition identifies the quiet hill given Mary and Baby Jesus as shelter with either Damascus or Jerusalem. Ibn al-Sabbah al-Andalusi, visiting the Holy Land in the 1390s, located Mary's palm tree on his map of the Temple Mount. See Antonio Constán-Nava, "Edición diplomática, traducción y estudio de la obra Niṣāb

newborn Jesus made an eloquent speech from the cradle, in which he defended his mother and explained his mission.<sup>23</sup> As a boy, Jesus shaped birds out of clay and brought them to life.<sup>24</sup>

Much greater in number are those elements found in the Bible and then echoed in, and perhaps inherited by, Muslim apocrypha.

Some of these were events in Jesus's life, although with differences in details and contexts. Prompted by a star, some men offered gifts to Jesus, to which the Muslim tradition attached deep-ken meanings: gold ("the lord of goods"), myrrh (which heals "what is broken and wounded"), and frankincense (only its smoke enters heaven)—just as Jesus was a lord, was a medium through which Yahweh healed, and would be taken up into heaven. A king of Syria demanded they reveal his birthplace, but an angel communicated that king's murderous intention, and so the gift-givers fled from him.<sup>25</sup>

After the Magi fled, Mary and Jesus evacuated into Egypt. In the Muslim version, this was motivated by a dispute with neighbours. Some parents living nearby refused to let their children play with Jesus, who angrily transformed those children into pigs. Mary thought this a good time to leave town.<sup>26</sup>

Satan took the adult Jesus to the top of the Jerusalem temple, and dared him to jump. In the Christian account Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:16 ("Do not put the Lord your God to the test"), but the Muslim tradition's plain ken heard a less certain, more human reply: "God ordered me not to put myself to the test, for I do not know whether he will save me or not."<sup>27</sup>

Jesus invited disciples to become fishers of men, and introduced himself to them, with the Muslims' Jesus explicitly subordinating himself to Muhammad the "Arabian prophet"<sup>28</sup>—a deep-ken defiance of the normal chronology, as Jesus was born centuries before Muhammad. Jesus later washed his disciples'

al-ajbār wa-taḍkirat al-ajyār de Ibn al-Ṣabbāḥ (s. IX H./XV e.C.)" (PhD thesis, University of Alicante, 2014), I, 709.

23 Qur'an 3:46, 19:29–31; "Arabic Infancy Gospel," in Scheelmelcher, ed., *New Testament Apocrypha*, I, 453, 460–61.

24 Qur'an 3:49, 5:110; "Infancy Gospel of Thomas," in Scheelmelcher, ed., *New Testament Apocrypha*, I, 444. See Neal Robinson, "Creating Birds from Clay: A Miracle of Jesus in the Qur'an and in Classical Muslim Exegesis," *Muslim World* 79 (1989): 1–13.

25 D1; R39–41.

26 D3; R31–33; Mt 2:13–23. See Thijs Porck, "And Then Christ Turned the Children into Pigs: A Curious Miracle in Late Medieval England," *Leiden Medievalists Blog*, 21 January 2022, <https://www.leidenmedievalistsblog.nl/articles/and-then-christ-turned-the-children-into-pigs-a-curious-miracle-in-late-medieval-england>

27 Mt 4:5–7; Lk 4:9–12; Kh34.

28 D5. See Mt 4:19; Mk 1:17.

feet despite their protests.<sup>29</sup> A Qur'anic reference to Simon Peter الصافي *al-safi* (the Pure) is, in the plain ken, probably a mistaken reference to the Christian name of him, أَلصَّفَا *al-safa* (the Rock).<sup>30</sup>

Jesus miraculously created wine at a wedding party; in the Muslim version this occurred at the home of a man whom he had previously helped by identifying an unusual criminal duo, a blind man who stood on the shoulders of a lame man to steal treasure hidden high and away.<sup>31</sup>

Questioned about his disreputable companions, Jesus compared them to the sick and himself to a doctor.<sup>32</sup> In contrast, Jesus complained about religious and intellectual elites at banquets.<sup>33</sup> Both traditions relayed accounts of an adulterer about to be stoned. In the Christian version this was a woman, and in the Muslim version, a man, apparently set up by Jesus who then ordered the stoning to make a pedagogical point. Jesus announced that only those without sin should throw a stone, and they all desisted, except, in the Muslim version, John the Baptist.<sup>34</sup>

His disciples witnessed Jesus walking on water; one tried to walk towards him but sank due to his lack of faith.<sup>35</sup> The Muslim traditions included Jesus teaching that he could walk because of his "certainty of faith," and the disciples could not because of their inability to see "stones, mud, and gold" as "equal." When they protested that they feared the waves, he admonished them, "Did you not fear the Lord of the wave?"<sup>36</sup>

Jesus sent out his disciples on a great commission to recruit more followers. In an Islamic version some refused, citing their incompetence in exotic languages; Jesus complained to Yahweh, who declared that he would "spare you this trouble" by granting the disciples miraculous language ability, echoing the Pentecost of the Christian canon.<sup>37</sup>

Beyond these narrative episodes, Islamic apocrypha repeated specific teachings Jesus gave in the Bible.

You must be reborn to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.<sup>38</sup> Build your house on solid ground, not on sand (Christian) or on the sea (Muslim).<sup>39</sup> Jesus predicted the destruction of a place of worship (in the Muslim version, "God will not

29 Kh269; Jn 1, 3:1–17.

30 Kh80; Mt 16:18.

31 D3; R31–33; Jn 2:1–11.

32 Kh81; Mt 9:10–12.

33 Kh93; Mt 23:5–6.

34 Kh54; Jn 8:3–9.

35 Kh35; Mt 14:22–33; Mk 6:45–52; Jn 6:16–21.

36 Kh47; D43; A160. See also D6; R37.

37 Kh89; D66–67; A211; Mt 28:16–20.

38 Kh273; Jn 3:3.

39 Mt 7:26–27; Kh41.



leave one stone of this mosque upon another”).<sup>40</sup> A camel can more easily pass through the eye of a needle than a rich man can enter paradise.<sup>41</sup> Be as innocent of cunning as doves: as the Muslim commentary explains, “you can take her chicks from under her and kill them, and she will then return to roost in the very same spot.”<sup>42</sup>

An eye that encourages sin should be gouged out. In the Muslim tradition, Jesus once decided to pray for rain, and to improve his efficiency sent away all sinners. One remained, explaining that to the best of his knowledge he had only sinned once, by looking at a woman, and had immediately repented by gouging out his eye and flicking it at her. Out of respect, Jesus decided to have this one-eyed man offer the prayer, reserving to himself only the amen, before the downpour began.<sup>43</sup> In another Muslim account Jesus restored the sight of two blind men, who through some deepened foreknowledge had anticipated this teaching and blinded themselves to avoid damnation.<sup>44</sup>

Both traditions include what has been called the Great Commandment and the Golden Rule: love Yahweh as much as possible, and love your neighbour as yourself.<sup>45</sup>

Much of the Christian Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5–8), and of its parallel Sermon on the Plain (Lk 6), reverberated in Muslim apocrypha (see Chapter 21). Jesus’s teachings loom more prominently in Muslim descriptions of his life than in Christian ones. You are the earth’s salt, which maintains its flavour even when watered down.<sup>46</sup> Jesus forbade not only adultery but even the contemplation of adultery; he forbade not only false swearing by Yahweh, but even any swearing by Yahweh at all.<sup>47</sup> Give with the right hand; hide with, or from, the left.<sup>48</sup> When you pray, close the door or curtain.<sup>49</sup> Accumulate treasure in heaven.<sup>50</sup> Concentrate on today, not tomorrow.<sup>51</sup> Do not cast your pearls before

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40 Kh71; Mt 24:1–2.

41 Mk 10:24–27; Lk 18:24–27; Mt 19:23–26; Kh63; Kh283.

42 Kh185; Mt 10:16.

43 Kh204; Mt 18:9.

44 D5–6; R36–37.

45 Mt 22:35–40; Mk 12:28–31; Lk 10:25–28; Kh48; Kh159, 170, 228.

46 Kh7; Mt 5:13.

47 Kh190; Mt 5:27–28, Mt 34–37.

48 Kh4, 29; Mt 6:3.

49 Kh4, 29; Mt 6:6. Kh188 recommends praying alone.

50 Mt 6:19–21; Kh33.

51 Mt 6:34; Kh73, 78, 232.

swine.<sup>52</sup> Pray for those who mistreat you.<sup>53</sup> Jesus also taught a prayer that drew a parallel between Yahweh's power on earth and in heaven.<sup>54</sup>

Yahweh takes care even of birds, so you need not yourself be acquisitive.<sup>55</sup> In the Muslim tradition, one doubter objected that human bellies were bigger than birds' bellies, which prompted Jesus to improve his metaphor: "Then look at these cattle, wild and tame, as they come and go, neither reaping nor plowing, and God provides for them too."<sup>56</sup>

The Christian instruction to answer being struck on one cheek by offering up the second cheek for a second blow was literalized in the Muslim tradition: Jesus and a disciple walked through the Pass of Afiq, near the Jordan River, said to be where Jesus would kill the Antichrist. Suddenly, a ruffian blocked their way: "I will not let you pass until I have struck each of you a blow." Jesus offered him his own cheek, but the disciple refused, so Jesus presented his own second cheek.<sup>57</sup>

## Divergences

In spite of these convergences, some information found in one tradition was unknown or heretical in the other. A modern joke recalls a desert island's sole shipwrecked inhabitant, who builds a church out of palm fronds, but soon abandons it to build a second church next to it, over a doctrinal dispute. The ease of disagreement splintered what was known, or thought to be known, about Jesus.

Let us now take a closer look at each of the three subcults, and the Jesus-beliefs unique to it. Those beliefs originated with the messenger who founded each subcult, but then developed through time. In this section we look at a third layer of information, substantially exclusive to its own subcult: information here is found in the canon of only one subcult (so known by half of the Jesus cultists) or in the apocrypha of only one subcult (so known by a smaller fraction of cultists).

Although the diversity of details can overwhelm, we summarize the nominal theological differences between the three subcults, and among the principle Christian subsubcults, in this chart, before describing them.

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52 Mt 7:6; Kh64, which explains the meaning: "Do not impart wisdom to one who does not desire it, for wisdom is more precious than pearls and whoever rejects wisdom is worse than a swine." Kh200 advises only giving wisdom to the worthy.

53 Kh211; Lk 6:28.

54 R34-35; D4-5.

55 Kh15; Mt 6:26

56 Kh15. D31; A146 has a variation of this, less interesting, but including ants.

57 Mt 5:39; Kh66; D14. A65 is an exact quotation, explicitly attributed to Matthew.

| SUBCULT      |                    | JESUS: DIVINE OR HUMAN?                  | WHO SEALS THE PROPHECY? |
|--------------|--------------------|--|-------------------------|
| Manichaeism  |                    | divine                                   | Mani                    |
| Christianity | Oriental Orthodox  | 1 person, with 1 (divine/human) nature   | Jesus                   |
|              | Western/Latin      | 1 person, with 2 (divine, human) natures |                         |
|              | Eastern/Greek      |  |                         |
|              | Church of the East | 2 (divine, human) persons                |                         |
| Islam        |                    | human                                    | Muhammad                |

Table 3.1 Subcult Theologies.

## Christians

The first messenger, Paul, a first-century Roman Jew, taught that Jesus was both divine<sup>58</sup> and human, a foundation of Christian doctrine.<sup>59</sup> Paul's teachings about the divine-and-human Jesus were the most complicated, or perhaps the most ambiguous, of our three messengers', and, partly as a result, in subsequent centuries the Christian subcult would shatter into even smaller subsubcults. The fundamental division between them was based on how Jesus could be both divine and human. The Nestorian Christians ("Church of the East"), maximizing the difference between the human and the divine, understood Jesus as having two different personas, one divine and one human. The Chalcedonian Christians reduced Jesus to a single persona, but one that had both a divine and a human nature. From the Nestorian point of view, the Chalcedonian view appeared almost Manichaean;<sup>60</sup> from the Chalcedonian point of view, the Nestorians would appear almost Muslim. Finally, the so-called "monophysites" (Eutychianists, Apollinarists, Miaphysites) emphasized the combination of the divine and human into a single *physis*, nature, that was both divine and human.

58 Much of the disputes revolve around the "divinity" of Jesus, and we take up that language here. It is, however, a false move to talk about "divinity" as a single phenomenon: in the Far West and the Core "divinity" referred to different things, and "divine" to different kinds of beings.

59 Excepting the Ebionites' only-human Jesus and the Docetists' only-divine Jesus.

60 Samuel N. C. Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China* (Dover, NH: Manchester UP, 1985), 96.

Even among the Chalcedonians we find disagreements on the relationship between the divine nature of Jesus and the divine nature of the Father, with the Arians maximizing the difference between the two.

Beyond doctrinal disputes, each of these three subsubcults would further split over divergences on issues of culture, language, and especially authority. By 1400, Paul's Christian subcult had divided into some forty-two subsubsubcults, in nineteen independent and autocephalous ("having its own head") churches, which can be broadly categorized as Latin/Western or Greek/Eastern (see Fig. 3.2). These ranged from the vast Catholic Church of Rome, with a flock containing a plurality if not an outright majority of Christians, to the tiny Catholicosate of Aghtamar, a single church on an island in Lake Van of eastern Anatolia. Beyond the broad generalizations of this paragraph, these were all relatively united in their understanding of Jesus, and so we will not treat them individually. Geographies overlapped: most noticeably, Jerusalem and Alexandria headquartered two churches each, and Antioch four. This is an academic analytic taxonomy, but it reflects identities on the ground.

What did Christians in our period believe? The main truth distinctive to the Christian tradition was that Jesus was God born human. In the Incarnation, God became the human, and divine, Jesus. For one understanding of the mechanics of the Incarnation, we can turn to Armenia. The theologian Grigor Tatevatsi (1346–1409/10) wrote a ten-volume *Girk' Harc'manc'* [Book of Questions] (1397); the first volume takes thirty-two chapters to explain the Incarnation. We find a synopsis in his creed, which appeared in the *Oskep'orik* [Book of Golden Content] (1407) and became a part of the Armenian mass liturgy: Jesus, or "God the Word," descended into Mary, where "taking of her blood, he united it with his Godhead." Then, for "nine months he patiently remained in the womb of the spotless Virgin, and the perfect God became perfect man, with soul, mind and body [...] God became man without any change or transformation; conceived without sperm and having an incorruptible birth."<sup>61</sup>

If we focus on information about Jesus found only in the Christian apocrypha, the emphasis is on Jesus's power, authority, and awesomeness. Many versions of infancy gospels circulated in medieval Europe, and paint a striking picture of Jesus's younger years. En route to Egypt, Jesus and his family discovered that the cave sheltering them housed dragons, which Jesus then tamed.<sup>62</sup> When child Jesus saw another boy splashing in water, he leapt to its defence, snarling, "You insolent, godless dunderhead, what harm did the pools and water do to you? See, now you

61 Mesrob K. Krikorian, "Grigor Tat'ewac'i: A Great Scholastic Theologian and Nominalist Philosopher," in *Medieval Armenian Culture*, ed. Thomas J. Samuelian and Michael E. Stone (Chico, CA: Scholar's Press, 1984), 134–36.

62 "Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew," in Scheelmecher, ed., *New Testament Apocrypha*, I, 462.

also shall wither like a tree.” That boy indeed wilted, but we can count him more fortunate than the child who bumped Jesus in the street and dropped dead. When the doomed children’s parents complained to Joseph, Jesus miraculously blinded them. There was a happy ending: once everyone eventually agreed to respect his authority, Jesus resurrected all the children he had slaughtered.<sup>63</sup>

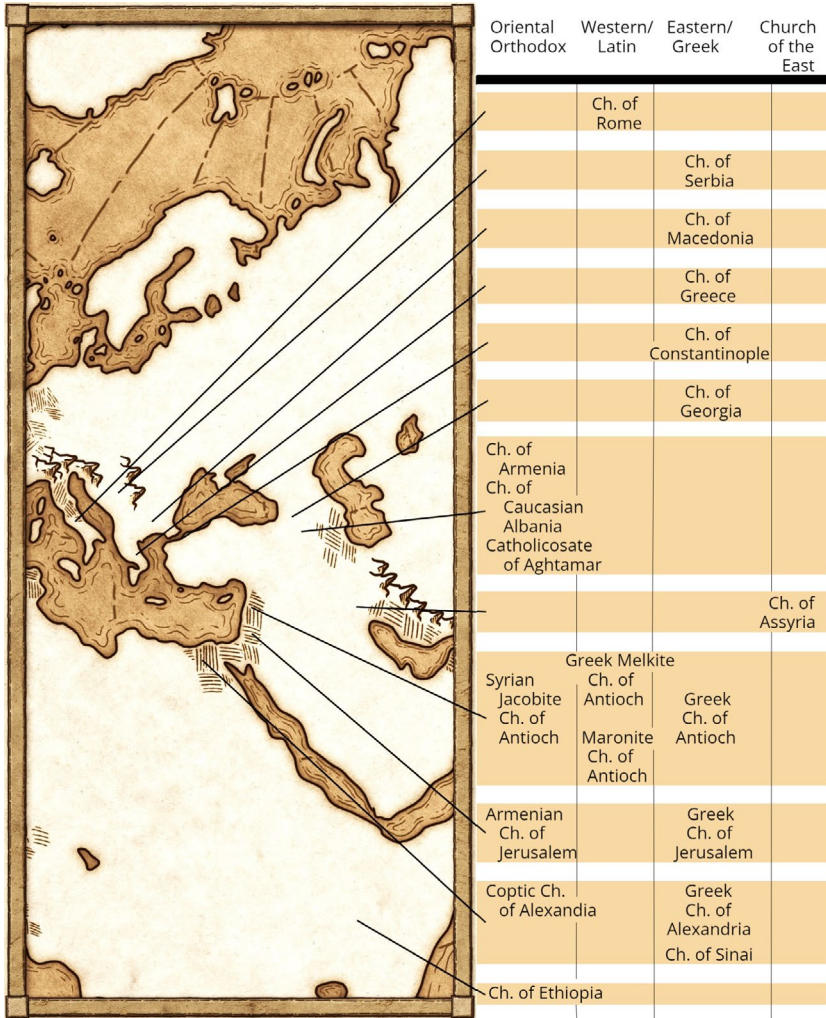


Fig. 3.2 The Forty-Two Subsubsubcults, map by Taf Richards, Arcane Atlas Cartography (@Arcane\_Atlas), CC BY-NC.

63 “The Infancy Story of Thomas,” in Scheelmecher, ed., *New Testament Apocrypha*, I, 444–46.

Other Christian apocrypha filled out the details of Jesus's life. The Proto-Gospel of James had Jesus healing a midwife's hand, which Yahweh had burnt after she had inspected Mary's hymen, intact, after birth.<sup>64</sup> In the Acts of Thomas, Jesus sold a reluctant disciple into slavery as a strategy to take the Gospel to India.<sup>65</sup>

### Manichaeans

Mani, our second messenger, lived in Persian-controlled Babylonia in the third century. After receiving revelations, Mani founded Manichaeism, encouraging followers to seek purity before the backdrop of a cosmic struggle between light and darkness. For Mani, Jesus was only divine. Manichaean doctrine recognized three Jesus figures—to the irritation of the fourth-century Augustine, a convert from that religion to Christianity, who had to ask, "Again, tell us how many Christs you say there are?" First, the Jesus of Splendour, associated with kindness, revealed to Adam that his soul was of divine origin but, mixed with matter, had become imprisoned in his body. Second, the Suffering Jesus lived in all plants and even stones, mystically crucified on a "cross of light" that was capable of feeling pain. This complicated the diets of the strictest Manichaeans. When one of Mani's followers nevertheless harvested vegetables, they cried "just like human beings and like children. Woe, woe! Blood streamed down from the place, which had been struck by the sickle in his hands, and they screamed with human voices as the blows fell."<sup>66</sup> The third Jesus was the historical prophet, Jesus the Messiah, who was the son of Yahweh by virtue of his baptism—the

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64 "The Protoevangelium of James," in Scheelmecher, ed., *New Testament Apocrypha*, I, 434–34.

65 "Acts of Thomas," in Scheelmecher, ed., *New Testament Apocrypha*, II, 339–40.

66 Ludwig Koenen and Cornelia Römer, ed., *Der Kölner Mani-Kodex: Über das Werden seines Leibes* (Opladen: Westdeutscher, 1988), 7. See Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire*; Samuel N. C. Lieu, *Manichaeism in Central Asia and China* (Leiden: Brill, 1998); Samuel N. C. Lieu, "'My Church is Superior...': Mani's Missionary Statement in Coptic and Middle Persian," in *Coptica-Gnostica-Manichaica*, ed. Louis Painchaud and Paul-Hubert Poirier (Quebec: Laval UP, 2006), 519–27; Samuel N. C. Lieu, "Nestorian Angels and Other Christian and Manichaean Remains on the South China Coast," in *Walls and Frontiers in Inner Asian History*, ed. Samuel N. C. Lieu and Craig Benjamin (Turnhout: Brepols, 2002), 1–17; Eugen Rose, *Die Manichäische Christologie* (Wiesbaden: O. Harrasowitz, 1979); Hans-Joachim Klimkeit, ed., *Gnosis on the Silk Road: Gnostic Texts from Central Asia* (Scranton: HarperCollins, 1993); John C. Reeves, *Prolegomena to a History of Islamicate Manichaeism* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2011); Ernst Waldschmidt and Wolfgang Lentz, *Die Stellung Jesu im Manichäismus* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1926); Alphonse Mingana, *The Early Spread of Christianity in Central Asia and the Far East* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1925); Paul Pelliot, "Chrétiens d'Asie centrale et d'extrême-Orient," *T'oung Pao* 15 (1914): 623–44.

idea of a virgin birth was disgusting—and appeared to die on the physical cross, like the Muslims' Jesus. All three could blend together. Some saw two Jesus figures, others one with different aspects.<sup>67</sup>

In practice, the Manichaeic denial of Jesus's human nature could be overshadowed by other priorities, such as harmlessness and vegetarianism. In the Near West, Christians traditionally used various tests to identify hidden Manichaeans, including meat-eating and ant-murdering, for a true Manichaeic would not be able to kill an ant.<sup>68</sup> Augustine, missing the point, could tolerate ascetic vegetarianism, but denounced the excessively delicious vegetarian meals Manichaeans prepared to avoid harming animals.<sup>69</sup>

Among his many roles, Mani recognized himself, alongside Paul, as one of Jesus's apostles, well positioned to spread his Gospel. Growing up in Babylon, at the heart of a nexus of trade networks linking the Near West to its wider world, Mani knew about many traditions: "Wisdom and deeds have always from time to time been brought to mankind by the messengers of God. So in one age they have been brought by the messenger, called Buddha, to India, in another by Zarâdusht to Persia, in another by Jesus to the West."<sup>70</sup> Mani, however, self-consciously developed his own to be more global and universal:

He who has his Church in the West, he and his Church have not reached the East: the choice of him who has chosen his Church in the East has not come to the West [...] But my hope, mine, will go towards the West, and she will go also towards the East. And they shall hear the voice of her message in all languages, and shall proclaim her in all cities. My Church is superior in this first point to previous churches, for these previous churches were chosen

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67 H. J. Klimkeit, "Manichaeism and Nestorian Christianity," in *The Age of Achievement: A.D. 750 to the End of the Fifteenth Century, Part 2, The Achievements*, ed. C. E. Bosworth and M. S. Asimov, History of Civilizations of Central Asia 4 (Paris: UNESCO, 2000), 69–81 (69).

68 For the case of the fourth-century Persian Christian saint Aeithala, who asked a convert from Manichaeism to confirm his Christian acceptance of murder by killing an ant, see Hippolyte Delehayé, ed., *Les versions grecques des Actes des martyrs persans sous Sapor II*, in *Patrologia Orientalis*, 50 vols. (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1907), II, 511–12.

69 Augustine of Hippo, *Opera Omnia I*, in *Patrologia Latina*, ed. J.-P. Migne, 217 vols. (Paris: Garnier, 1877), XXXII, col. 1357.

70 Abu Rayhan al-Biruni, *The Chronology of Ancient Nations*, ed. and trans. Edward Sachau (London: Allen, 1879), 190.

in particular countries and in particular cities. My Church, mine shall spread in all cities and my Gospel shall touch every country.<sup>71</sup>

He travelled widely, and in Baluchistan the king praised Mani as a Buddha.<sup>72</sup>

As the Mani subcult moved east, its Jesus figures also converged with various Buddhas. The second, Suffering, Jesus merged with the Buddha Vairocana. According to one medieval Turkish text, “The essence of the Buddha Vairocana is everything: earth, mountains, stone, sand, the water of streams and rivers, all ponds, brooks and lakes, all plants and trees, all living beings and men.” The third Jesus, the Messiah, sometimes became the Buddha Maitreya, and the idea of Jesus crucified in all living, and some non-living, things also came to influence Buddhism. Jesus’s Crucifixion, in fact, came to be referred to as his “parinirvana,” his final liberation from cyclical existence.<sup>73</sup>

Visual evidence of this Jesus convergence endures in the Himalayas. At Alchi in Ladakh, on the south bank of the upper Indus River, an image of Jesus as the Buddha of Blood (Akshobhya 阿闍) adorned the walls of a three-storey temple. In 1400, it was already a few centuries old. This Jesus looks Buddhist, but the number of crosses suggests otherwise. Instead of Akshobhya’s usual thunderbolt, this Jesus-Akshobhya has a Cross of Light (see Fig. 3.3). Vairocana, we would expect from his own convergence with Jesus, also has crosses. Nearby, Amitabha Buddha has a white cross of his own, and is paired with the sun, possibly in contrast to the common association of the moon with Jesus.<sup>74</sup>

71 James Stevenson, ed., *A New Eusebius: Documents Illustrative of the History of the Church to A.D. 337* (London: SPCK, 1968), 282.

72 Jason BeDuhn, “Parallels between Coptic and Iranian Kephalaia: Goundesh and the King of Touran,” in *Mani at the Court of the Persian Kings*, ed. Iain Gardner, Jason BeDuhn, and Paul Dilley (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 52–74 (56–57).

73 Mary Boyce, *A Reader in Manichaean Middle Persian and Parthian* (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 127; Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire*, 126–27, 251; Klimkeit, ed., *Gnosis on the Silk Road*, 63–78; Peter Zieme, “Uigurische Steuerbefreiungsurkunden für buddhistische Klöster,” *Altorientalische Forschungen* 8 (1981): 237–63 (242).

74 Hans-Joachim Klimkeit, “Vairocana und das Lichtkreuz. Manichäische Elemente in der Kunst von Alchi (West Tibet),” *Zentralasiatische Studien* 13 (1979): 359–99 (376–78); Hans-Joachim Klimkeit, “Das Kreuzessymbol in der zentralasiatischen Religionsbegegnung,” *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* 31 (1979): 99–115 (112–15); Hans-Joachim Klimkeit, *Manichaean Art and Calligraphy* (Leiden: Brill, 1982), 32–33; Peter Van Ham and Amy Heller, *Alchi: Treasure of the Himalayas* (Munich: Hirmer Publishers, 2019), 284–85. For a more skeptical approach, see Lieu, *Manichaeism in Central Asia*, 54–56. Pratapaditya Pal and Lionel Fournier, *A Buddhist Paradise: The Murals of Alchi Western Himalayas* (New Delhi: Ravi Kumar, 1982), S70.





Fig. 3.3 Akshobhya in His Eastern Paradise (late eleventh century), Alchi Monastery, Regents of the University of Michigan, Department of the History of Art, Visual Resources Collections. All rights reserved.

The Manichaeans in China,<sup>75</sup> with their centre at the trading entrepôt of Quanzhou, were called, pejoratively, “vegetarian demon worshippers” 喫菜事魔 (the worshippers were vegetarian, not the demons).<sup>76</sup> The identification of Jesus as a, or the, Buddha was apparently complete—medieval records refer to the Buddha Yishu 夷数, a translation of Isho ܝܫܘܥ, the Eastern Syriac pronunciation of Jesus’s name.<sup>77</sup> Manichaeans were denounced by

- 75 Peter Bryder, *The Chinese Transformation of Manichaeism: A Study of Chinese Manichaeism Terminology* (n.p.: Plus Ultra, 1985); Hans-J. Klimkeit, “Jesus’ Entry into Parinirvāṇa: Manichaean Identity in Buddhist Central Asia,” *Numen* 33 (1986): 225–40.
- 76 “喫菜事魔” occurs in (1) 宋名臣言行錄, 卷十七 (“Words and Deeds of Famous Officials of the Song Dynasty,” vol. XVII, *Chinese Philosophy Texts Electronic Project*, <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&chapter=606510>); (2) 佛祖統紀第四十八 [0430c28] and [0431a17] (“The Records of the Buddha,” vol. XLVIII, *CBETA Chinese Tripitaka*, [http://tripitaka.ceta.org/T49n2035\\_048](http://tripitaka.ceta.org/T49n2035_048)); and (3) 廬山蓮宗寶鑑念佛正論卷第十(二十五章) [0349b19] (“Lushan Lotus Sect Treasure Book,” vol. X, *CBETA Chinese Tripitaka*, [http://tripitaka.cbeta.org/T47n1973\\_010](http://tripitaka.cbeta.org/T47n1973_010)). See Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire*, 245. Google Translate renders “喫菜事魔” as “foodie”!
- 77 “夷数佛” occurs in (1) 宋会要辑稿, ed. 徐松, 第一百六十五册, 刑法二(上) (“Collected Drafts of the Statutes of the Song Dynasty, ed. Xu Song (1781–1848), fasc. 165, Song Huiyao Collection,” vol. CLXV, Criminal Law II (Part 1), *Chinese Philosophy Texts Electronic Project*, <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&chapter=441491>); and (2) 摩尼教下部讚 (“Part 2 of Manichaeism,” vol. I, *CBETA Chinese Tripitaka*, [http://tripitaka.cbeta.org/T54n2140\\_001](http://tripitaka.cbeta.org/T54n2140_001)). For a translation of (2) see Tsui Chi, trans., “摩尼教下部讚 Mo Ni Chiao Hsia Pu Tsan: The Lower (Second?) Section of the Manichaean Hymns,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 11 (1943): 174–219. For the Syriac, see Jingyi Ji, *Encounters Between Chinese Culture and Christianity: A Hermeneutical Perspective* (Berlin: Hopf, 2007), 39. The Chinese name for Jesus literally means “barbarian

a twelfth-century literatus as worshipping Jesus under the titles “Flesh Buddha,” “Bone Buddha,” “Blood Buddha.”<sup>78</sup> This was not a purely external insult; one Manichaean Chinese scroll itself referred to the “Jesus of flesh and blood.”<sup>79</sup> At the same time, a thirteenth-century Daoist scoffed at the idea that the Manichaean Jesus and Cross of Light was the Buddha Vairocana.<sup>80</sup> In 1292, Marco Polo (ca. 1254–1324) encountered Manichaeans in Fujian, but misidentified them as Catholic Christians, despite Nestorian Christians and Buddhists each trying to claim the ambiguous group for themselves. In the confusion, those Manichaeans gamely acquiesced to Marco Polo’s insistence, and agreed that they were probably Catholic.<sup>81</sup>

One ca. 1200 scroll, a painting on silk, depicts the Manichaean Jesus sitting in lotus position on a tiered lotus throne, under a halo under a canopy (see Fig. 3.4). His right hand gestures with deep-ken meaning, and his left holds a golden cross on a red stand.<sup>82</sup> This may correspond to a reference in a broadly contemporary source to a “Jesus Buddha Image” 夷數佛幘.<sup>83</sup> Over the centuries, the scroll found its way to the Seiunji Temple 棲雲寺 outside of Kōshū, Japan, where today its Jesus origins are forgotten.

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number,” perhaps an improvement of the earlier translation, also pronounced “Yishu,” that meant “moving rat” 移鼠. See Antonino Forte, “Deux études sur le manichéisme chinois,” *T’oung Pao*, 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 2. 59 (1973): 220–53; Lieu *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire*, 218.

- 78 This is Lu Yu 陸游 (1125–1210), in a memorial from the 1160s, in the 渭南文集, at 5.8a (“Weinan Collected Works Volume 5,” vol. IX, *Chinese Philosophy Texts Electronic Project*, <https://ctext.org/library.pl?if=gb&file=582&page=16&remap=gb>). See Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire*, 245–46; Samuel N. C. Lieu, *Manichaeism in Central Asia*, 16, 54–55, 137.
- 79 歎五明文, 第二疊, in 摩尼教下部讚 T2140, 1276 (“Part 2 of Manichaeism,” vol. I, *CBETA Online Reader*, <https://cbetaonline.dila.edu.tw/zh/T2140>). Tsui Chi translates this as “the flesh and blood of Jesus,” but Lieu prefers “Jesus of the flesh and blood.” Tsui, trans., “摩尼教下部讚 Mo Ni Chiao Hsia Pu Tsan,” 198; Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire*, 246. See Henri-Charles Puech, *Sur le manichéisme et autres essais* (Paris: Flammarion, 1979), 159–62.
- 80 白玉蟾, 海瓊白珍人语录, 9c (“Hai Qiong Bai’s Quotations,” *Chinese Philosophy Texts Electronic Project*, <https://ctext.org/library.pl?if=gb&file=100526&page=26&remap=gb>). See Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire*, 210. Here Vairocana is 毗遮那. The title that Lieu gives appears to have swapped 珍 with its homonym 真.
- 81 Marco Polo, *The Description of the World*, ed. A. C. Moule and Paul Pelliot, 2 vols. (London: Routledge, 1938), I, 349–50. See Leonardo Olschki, “Manichaeism, Buddhism and Christianity in Marco Polo’s China,” *Zeitschrift der schweizerischen Gesellschaft für Asienkunde* 5 (1951): 1–21; Samuel N. C. Lieu, “Nestorians and Manichaeans on the South China Coast,” *Vigilae Christianae* 34 (1980): 71–88 (76–79).
- 82 See Zsuzsanna Gulácsi, “A Manichaean Portrait of the Buddha Jesus: Identifying a Twelfth-Thirteenth-century Chinese Painting from the Collection of Seiun-ji Zen Temple,” *Artibus Asiae* 69 (2009): 91–145.
- 83 徐松, ed., 宋会要辑稿.



Fig. 3.4 Buddha Jesus (ca. 1200), Seiunji Temple, Kōshū City. Wikimedia, public domain, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jesus\\_as\\_a\\_Manichaeen\\_Prophet,\\_13th\\_century.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jesus_as_a_Manichaeen_Prophet,_13th_century.jpg)

A new dynasty in China brought disaster for the Manichaeen community there. With the Mongol-Chinese Yuan dynasty in decline, sectarian rebel groups hoped that when the misery bottomed out a new Buddha would appear with the Manichaeen Light, as the “Prince of Radiance” 明王, to issue in a new age. In 1368, with the help of the Buddha Maitreya, who had his own Jesus links, the rebel commander Zhu Yuanzhang (1328–98) established a new dynasty, with a name suggesting that these hopes were sincere and enduring: *Ming* 明, “radiant brilliance,” the same character as in the Manichaeen title. Perhaps this was a reference to Confucian clarity, or to the Manichaeen Light, and thus indirectly to Jesus. Strategically, Zhu Yuanzhang issued, unusually, no official explanation.<sup>84</sup> The establishment of the Ming Dynasty placed a taboo on the

84 John Dardess, “The Transformation of Messianic Revolt and the Founding of the Ming Dynasty,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 29 (1970): 539–58 (539); Romeyn Taylor, “Social Origins of the Ming Dynasty,” *Monumenta Serica* 22 (1963): 1–78 (61).

character *ming* 明; people and places called Ming abandoned their names for alternatives that would not offend the imperial sensibility. Oblivious or proud, the Manichaeans, followers of the Religion of Light, of Mani and the Jesus of Splendour, did not surrender the name they had unwittingly usurped from the dynasty a half millennium before its founding. The emperor ordered the strangulation of the Manichaean leadership, and the flogging (“with a hundred strokes of the heavy baton”) and exile (“to a distance of 3,000 *li*”) of its rank and file. When they ceased to be a threat, the emperor revoked the persecution.<sup>85</sup>

So widely oppressed, the Manichaeans declined over the centuries. Language continued to present problems: Mani’s name was sometimes transliterated using a character that means demon 魔; in the West, his followers doubled his “n,” so that “Manni” would look less like the word “maniac.” In 1400, we still see some actual Manichaeans only in China; by 1600, only a single Manichaean shrine 草庵寺, near Quanzhou, was known to exist there. Perhaps traces of Manichaean beliefs endured among the Bogomils of Bulgaria and Serbia. The name loomed larger than the people: In the Far West, Church authorities conceptualized heresies with references to their founders, so the Poor of Lyons became called Waldensians after Valdes (Peter Waldo, ca. 1140–1205), and the Cathars became—with a bit of intelligent speculation—Manichaeans.<sup>86</sup> This decline was such that the Manichaeans make little appearance in this book beyond this chapter.

85 明律集解附例, quoted in É. Chavannes and P. Pelliot, “Un traité manichéen retrouvé en Chine [deuxième partie],” *Journal asiatique* 11.1 (1913): 368–69; 閩書, by the sixteenth-century scholar He Qiaoyuan 何喬遠, quoted in Paul Pelliot, “Les traditions manichéennes au Foukien,” *T’oung Pao* 22 (1923): 193–208 (198–99). See Hellmut Wilhelm, “On Ming Orthodoxy,” *Monumenta Serica* 29 (1970–71): 1–26; Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire*, 259–64.

86 Peter Biller, “Christians and Heretics,” in *Christianity in Western Europe c. 1100–c. 1500*, ed. Miri Rubin and Walter Simons, Cambridge History of Christianity 4 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2009), 170–86 (173), <https://doi.org/10.1017/chol9780521811064.014>; Peter Bryder, “...Where the Faint Traces of Manichaeism Disappear,” *Altorientalische Forschungen* 15 (1988): 201–08; Samuel N. C. Lieu, “Polemics against Manichaeism as a Subversive Cult in Sung China (A.D. c. 960–c. 1200),” *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 62 (1979): 132–67; Victor N. Sharenkoff, *A Study of Manichaeism in Bulgaria* (New York: Columbia UP, 1927); Dimitri Obolensky, *The Bogomils: A Study in Balkan Neo-Manichaeism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1948); Steven Runciman, *The Medieval Manichee: A Study of the Christian Dualist Heresy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1947).

## Muslims

Our third messenger, Muhammad, was born at the end of the sixth century in Arabia. According to some Christians, Muhammad started a new subcult because he was annoyed at having not been chosen as pope.<sup>87</sup> The reality was different: Muhammad's prophecy, given to him by Gabriel and recorded in the Qur'an, denounced any deviation from monotheism. Jesus, though a great prophet, was only human. Muhammad's new prophecy complemented and effectively replaced Jesus's. Unlike Paul or Mani, Muhammad was in no way subordinate to Jesus. Muhammad sealed—closed—the prophetic tradition, and the Qur'an complimented and replaced Jesus's teachings. Thus in the seventh century a new, Islamic branch of the Jesus cult emerged.

This human Jesus remained of importance in Islam.<sup>88</sup> The Qur'an included Jesus references in some ninety verses spread across fifteen chapters. We have seen Jesus traditions that Muslims shared with Christians. A number of Qur'anic traditions about Jesus were unique to Islam, as when Jesus brought down a food-laden table as an edible proof (*ayah*) of his prophethood.<sup>89</sup> Much of Islam's distinct understanding was not about what Jesus did, but about what he was.

Let us look first at the Qur'an's account.

Jesus was one of many messengers, and those before him have come and gone.<sup>90</sup> There was no essential distinction among them, and Jesus's name found itself on a longer list of prophets.<sup>91</sup> Extraordinarily, Yahweh raised Jesus to be the second prophet.<sup>92</sup> One of Jesus's roles was to prepare for Muhammad; another was to prepare for the end of the world.<sup>93</sup> All the prophets were mortal.<sup>94</sup> Jesus, unique among the prophets, was misunderstood by his followers, who distorted his message, but the Qur'an corrected this. Muhammad completed Jesus's prophecy.

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87 Aziz Suryal Atiya, *The Crusade of Nicopolis* (London: Methuen, 1934), 122.

88 In later Muslim tradition, Jesus would be described as the "seal of the saints." See Michel Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints: Prophethood and Sainthood in the Doctrine of Ibn 'Arabi*, trans. Liadain Sherrard (Cambridge, UK: Islamic Texts Society, 1993), 74–88, 116–29; Zachary Markwith, "Jesus and Christic Sanctity in Ibn 'Arabi and Early Islamic Spirituality," *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society* 57 (2015): 85–114; Louis Massignon, *The Passion of Al-Hallaj, Mystic and Martyr of Islam*, trans. Herbert Mason, 4 vols. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1982), III, 208–09.

89 Qur'an 5:111–14.

90 Qur'an 5:75.

91 Qur'an 2:137, 3:84, 4:164, 6:84–86.

92 Qur'an 2:253.

93 Qur'an 61:6.

94 Qur'an 2:136, 14:11.

The greatest distinction was the Muslim insistence that Yahweh was one, and therefore Jesus was not Yahweh. God was one, the creator. Polytheism was incompatible and offensive. The goal of all this was the straight, even path. The Qur'an emphasized monotheism and the better treatment for those economically or culturally marginalized. Those who believed in one God and lived good lives would be judged worthy of paradise.<sup>95</sup>

Jesus, therefore, was not "the third of three."<sup>96</sup> The Qur'an condemned the Christians' Incarnation as divine reproduction, and their Trinity as tritheism. Jesus and his mother, like normal created non-divine beings, ate food.<sup>97</sup> At one point, Yahweh directly asked Jesus, "Did you say to people, 'Take me and my mother as two gods alongside God?' Jesus replied, 'I would never say what I had no right to say—if I had said a such a thing You would have known it: You know all that is within me, though I do not know what is within You, You alone have full knowledge of things unseen.'"<sup>98</sup> These reasons and testimonial served to give disbelievers an opportunity to avoid the doom awaiting them—exile from the Garden, banishment to Hell.<sup>99</sup>

Jesus was not even the son of Yahweh.<sup>100</sup> Indeed, Yahweh was one, incomparable, and eternal, so he could not beget children.<sup>101</sup> It was not appropriate for Yahweh to have children, as he was far above that.<sup>102</sup> Such an outrageous statement, the Qur'an warned, "almost causes the heavens to be torn apart, the earth to split asunder, the mountains to crumble to pieces."<sup>103</sup> Just as the Christians claimed "sonship" for Jesus, some Jews also claimed sonship for the fifth-century priest Ezra. Here the Qur'an takes up a plain-ken argument: so many people making such a claim weakened it.<sup>104</sup> Moreover, how could Yahweh have a son if he has no spouse?<sup>105</sup> Yahweh admonished Muhammad to promise to be the first to worship the son of Yahweh should one exist. That Muhammad nevertheless worshiped no son proved that none existed.<sup>106</sup> In the 1480s, Christian reports from Jerusalem and Egypt described contemporary Muslim arguments against the divine sonship of Jesus: the existence of a son of

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95 Qur'an 19:36, 42:15, 43:64.

96 Qur'an 5:73, 4:171.

97 Qur'an 5:75.

98 Qur'an 5:116.

99 Qur'an 5:72.

100 Qur'an 4:171.

101 Qur'an 112:1–3.

102 Qur'an 19:35.

103 Qur'an 19:90.

104 Qur'an 9:30.

105 Qur'an 6:101.

106 Qur'an 43:81.

God created the possibility of that son rebelling against his father, thus dividing the faithful, and Muhammad had stated that Jesus himself denied the sonship.<sup>107</sup>

Yahweh was angry that Christians divided Him into multiple beings, and that this division in turn divided his followers. He commanded Jesus and the other prophets to uphold the faith and work against creating factions, for the existence of such divisions contradicted the power of Yahweh: Christians, for example, could not have special status as “beloved” since that would obstruct the power of Yahweh to forgive and punish freely.<sup>108</sup>

Another disagreement with Christian truth concerned whether Jesus had died. Yahweh created Jesus, and had the power to destroy him,<sup>109</sup> but from the Muslim perspective, a great prophet could not be crucified ignobly, and so we know that he was not crucified. Christian Morgenstern (1871–1914) wrote a poem entitled “Die unmögliche Tatsache” [The Impossible Fact] about a man fatally struck by a car, who survives his death only because he was somewhere cars were forbidden. He could not have been killed by a car (legally), and so he was not killed by a car (biologically). The humour works because of the disjunction between the legal and the biological. In the case of the Muslims’ Jesus, the contrast comes between the will of Yahweh and biology; unlike the motor-vehicle code, the will of Yahweh is not restricted to a single sphere, and so his deep-ken authority overrides the plain-ken conditions of biology. The details here varied among different Muslims. Some, a minority, found the Qur’an’s description (surah 4) compatible with a later natural death for Jesus, and the tiniest of minorities even allowed for his death on the cross. Opinions differed on who was crucified in Jesus’s place, with Judas or Simon of Cyrene the most frequently proposed candidates.<sup>110</sup>

If we go beyond the Qur’an to look specifically at Muslim apocrypha, the emphasis shifts from Jesus’s humanity to his asceticism. We also see a greater diversity, for the apocryphal Jesus changed tenor across time and genre in the Muslim sources: he was more apocalyptic in the hadith—the collection of handed-down traditions about Muhammad—yet more austere in the Tales of

107 Denis-Charles Godefroy-Méniglaise, ed., *Voyage de George de Lengherand* (Mons: Masquillier and Dequesne, 1861), 181.

108 Qur’an 5:18, 21:93, 42:13, 43:65.

109 Qur’an 5:17.

110 Qur’an 3:48, 4:156–57; D8; D40–42; A128. Daniel A. Madigan, “Themes and Topics,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur’an*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2006), 79–96 (89), <https://doi.org/10.1017/ccol0521831601.005>; W. Richard Oakes, Jr., “The Cross of Christ: Islamic Perspectives” (PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2013), <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/429710455.pdf>. Manichaeans also claim that Jesus avoided crucifixion by a last-minute substitution, whereby the one executed was the son of the widow of Nain, or even the devil. See David Sox, *The Gospel of Barnabas* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1984), 99.

the Prophet. In the ninth century, he was more urbane, but by the thirteenth, he fought against straight-laced legalists. These trends in the Muslims' Jesus echoed trends in wider Muslim society, such as the conflicts between scholars and Sufi mystics.<sup>111</sup>

"In times of distress," Jesus "was happy, and in times of ease he was sad,"<sup>112</sup> when he might weep until tears soaked his beard.<sup>113</sup> Explaining that sane people did not joke around, Jesus rejected worldly priorities.<sup>114</sup> When asked what his greatest feat was, Jesus replied, "Leaving alone that which does not concern me."<sup>115</sup> In his asceticism, Jesus owned only a cup and a comb, but abandoned both upon noticing others using their fingers as alternatives.<sup>116</sup> Jesus's asceticism justified the Sufis' own asceticism.<sup>117</sup>

Sometimes the Muslims' Jesus could be surprisingly worldly. When Jesus met a man wanting to divorce his wrinkled wife, he simply advised her to diet, "for when food piles up in the stomach and grows excessive, the face loses its smoothness." When she did eat less, her face shed its wrinkles and the marriage was saved.<sup>118</sup> Jesus advised washing food before cooking it, and sleeping with the mouth open to allow gas to escape.<sup>119</sup> This passage speaks to the plain ken; nothing here invites the deep ken to find subtle meaning in the flatulence.

Perhaps such advice reflected Jesus's kindness. Multiple stories remembered Jesus helping a cow give birth.<sup>120</sup> One man spent three hundred years worshipping Yahweh between the graves of his parents and hoping to meet Jesus; Jesus arrived, gave his thigh to the dying man as a pillow, and draped his cloak over the corpse.<sup>121</sup> Jesus was also a witness to the power of the love of Yahweh. In one instance, he refused to grant someone an atom's weight of Yahweh's love, as the intensity of that would be more than the man could bear; Jesus agreed to give a half-atom's weight of Yahweh-love to the man, who, upon receiving it, went mad and fled into the mountains.<sup>122</sup>

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111 Kh 79, 202. See Tarif Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1994), 210–15.

112 Kh135.

113 D64; A201.

114 Kh163.

115 Kh88.

116 Kh222.

117 Suleiman A. Mourad, "A Twelfth-Century Muslim Biography of Jesus," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 7 (1996): 39–45 (43–44), <https://doi.org/10.1080/09596419608721066>

118 Kh152.

119 Kh154.

120 Kh103, Kh108.

121 D66–67; A222.

122 Kh238; D63; A189.



Later theologians continued the Qur'an's defence of Jesus's humanity. 'Abd al-Jabbar (935–1025), a magistrate at Rey, today a district of Tehran, noted that Jesus ate and defecated, and therefore could not be divine.<sup>123</sup> Ibn Hazm (994–1064) and al-Ghazali (ca. 1058–1111) used the gospels' characterization of Jesus not having knowledge of the Last Hour to prove his lack of divinity.<sup>124</sup>

These theologians also concentrated their attention on the latter parts of Jesus's life. Among opinions about Jesus's death, most sided with al-Tabari's (839–923) declaration that Jesus would only die once, in the future.<sup>125</sup> The Passion account of Ibn Kathir (ca. 1300–73) offered a number of details. In it, the Jews convinced the astrologer-king of Damascus to direct the governor of Jerusalem to arrest and crucify Jesus. A delegation of Jews and soldiers surrounded his house. Inside, Jesus asked his disciples, "Who among you would consent to bear my likeness and be my companion in paradise?" The sole volunteer was so young that Jesus only accepted his offer the third time it was tendered.<sup>126</sup> Jesus then ascended to heaven through a sudden gap in the ceiling, and the disciples surrendered the youth to the authorities, who executed him. Ibn Kathir noted, without confidence, that Mary might have wept at the cross, "but God knows best." He sniffed that the switch succeeded, despite the fact that some of the disciples had seen Jesus go through the roof, because later Christians were too stupid to trust eyewitnesses.<sup>127</sup>

The Ascension of Jesus could challenge Muslims because Muhammad, the greater prophet, merely died, a lesser fate. Probably inspired by Christian images of Jesus enthroned in Heaven, Muslims began asserting that Muhammad, or at least his soul (*ruh*), had also ascended to Heaven. Authorities differed in their opinions. Sa'id ibn al-Musayyib (642–715) held that Muhammad was resurrected forty days after his burial, a tradition cited in our period, as by al-Samhudi

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123 'Abd al-Jabbār, *The Critique of Christian Origins*, trans. Gabriel Said Reynolds and Samir Khalil Samir (Provo: BYU Press, 2010), 32–35 (part 2, 29–64), <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047405825>; Gabriel Said Reynolds, *A Muslim Theologian in the Sectarian Milieu: 'Abd al-Jabbār and the 'Critique of Christian Origins'* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2004), 177, <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047405825>

124 *Pace* Qur'an 43:61.

125 Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *Qur'ānic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1991), 132.

126 Al-Suyuti, citing Ibn Abbas (619–87), reported that Jesus accepted a third volunteer, after rejecting the first two. See Todd Lawson, *The Crucifixion and the Qur'an: A Study in the History of Muslim Thought* (New York: Oneworld Publications, 2014), 113.

127 Mahmoud Ayyoub, "Towards an Islamic Christology, 2: The Death of Jesus—Reality or Illusion?," *The Muslim World* 10 (1980): 91–121 (100), <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-1913.1980.tb03405.x>; Lawson, *The Crucifixion and the Qur'an*, 111; Madigan, "Themes and Topics," 89.

(1440–1506). Ibn Taymiyya (1263–1328) insisted Muhammad was absolutely dead and incapable of helping anyone. On the other extreme, Jalal-al-Din al-Suyuti (1445–1505) suggested that Muhammad was now everywhere at once. The convert-from-Christianity ‘Abd Allah al-Tarjuman (1355–1423) criticized the Christian argument that Jesus must be God because he ascended into heaven, since Enoch and Elias had also ascended into heaven, but were not God.<sup>128</sup>

These same theologians worked out the specifics of Jesus’s eschatological role. Many held that Jesus would return from heaven to defeat the Antichrist and correct the Christians—by destroying crosses, exterminating pigs, and helping them become true Muslims. He then would retire, until he died of natural causes, and would be buried at the Prophet’s Mosque in Medina.<sup>129</sup> Often this was an unknown future, but Ibn ‘Asakir (ca. 1105–75) expected Jesus to return soon, to fight the contemporary crusaders.

These deeds were sometimes linked to a shadowy eschatological figure called the “Mahdi.” Jesus’s relationship with the Mahdi changed over time. Before our period, some thought Jesus himself was the Mahdi, but over the centuries the Mahdi became understood as a descendant of Muhammad, making identity with Jesus chronologically impossible to the Muslim plain-ken sensibility. Especially in the Shi’a branch of Islam, Jesus would herald the Mahdi’s return. The eminent scholar Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406), one of the last great sociologists, believed Jesus and the Mahdi were distinct, but had different theories of whether they descend together or separately, and whether the Mahdi would help Jesus kill the Antichrist.<sup>130</sup>

128 Miguel de Epalza, *La Tuhfa, autobiografía y polémica islámica contra el cristianismo de Abdallah al-Taryuman (fray Anselmo Turmeda)* (Rome: Accademia nazionale dei Lincei, 1971), 344–45, 444; Fritz Meier, “A Resurrection of Muhammad in Suyūṭī,” in *Essays on Islamic piety and Mysticism*, trans. John O’Kane (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 505–47 (509, 514, 538).

129 Qur’an 43:61. Gerald T. Elmore, “The ‘Millennial’ Motif in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s *Book of the Fabulous Gryphon*,” *The Journal of Religion* 81 (2001): 410–37 (423), <https://doi.org/10.1086/490880>; Sebald Hofbeck, “Christological Doctrines in Islam,” in *Laeta Dies: 50 Jahre Studienkolleg St. Benedikt*, ed. Stephan Amon and Ulrich Märzhäuser (Münsterschwarzach: Vier-Türme-Verlag, 1968), 185; Zeki Saritoprak, “The Legend of al-Dajjāl (Antichrist): The Personification of Evil in the Islamic Tradition,” *Muslim World* 93 (2003): 291–307, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1478-1913.00024>

130 Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, trans. Franz Rosenthal, 3 vols. (New York: Pantheon, 1958), III, 156–57, 184–86, 192–95 (ch. 111, sec. 51). See Zafar Ishaq Ansari, “Taftāzānī’s Views of *taklīf*, *ḡabr* and *qadar*: A Note of the Development of Islamic Theological Doctrines,” *Arabica* 16 (1969): 65–78; Gabriel Said Reynolds, “Jesus, the Qā’im and the End of the World,” *Rivista degli studi orientali* 75 (2001): 55–86; Jane Idleman Smith and Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004), 60–70, <https://doi.org/10.1093/0195156498.001.0001>; Gerald T. Elmore, *Islamic Sainthood*

Medieval Muslims were horrified both by Christianity's distorted version of truth and by its division into various subcults. They believed that the falsehood and the division encouraged each other. Ibn Taymiyya mocked the "muddled, differing, and contradictory" Christology of the Christians as being "neither reasonable nor indicated by any sacred book," which caused the splintering of their subcult, with "each sect declaring the others unbelievers."<sup>131</sup>

A number of Muslim thinkers used the plain ken to explain these catastrophes. 'Abd al-Jabbar launched a plain-ken attack on the gospels' Crucifixion by appealing to various skepticisms: humans were flawed witnesses, and copyists flawed transmitters. He ended up carefully staying within cautious language ("might have changed" "it was possible" "the validity of which [...] is unknown"). He even argued that because historically Christians were not circumcised, Jesus's circumcision proved that he was not Christian. 'Abd al-Jabbar saw the Trinity as merely a reflection of the three facets of the mind in Roman psychology, that is, intellect, perceiver, and perceived. Several theologians saw Christianity as a false version of Jesus's teaching that had been Hellenized through the course of history.<sup>132</sup>

Already in the eleventh century Ibn Hazm and al-Ghazali were writing about the subcults of Christianity. Abu Ishak Ahmad al-Tha'labi (d. 1035) blamed Paul for perverting the Islamic message of Jesus, and thus engineering this division. In the twelfth century, al-Shahrastani (1086–1153) argued that Paul had created the divisions by corrupting the actual teachings of Jesus, while Ibn 'Asakir (1105–75) instead put the blame on Satan. Similarly, al-Suyuti used three Crucifixion volunteers to clarify the subsequent history by linking them to the three kinds of believers: the rejected volunteers led to the Jacobites and Nestorians, while the volunteer whom Jesus accepted generated the Muslims.<sup>133</sup>

To better understand this process, we can return to the account of 'Abd al-Jabbar, whose plain ken saw Paul, Mani, and Constantine conspiring against Jesus.<sup>134</sup> In this version, the "wicked and evil" Paul thrived on dissension. After

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*in the Fullness of Time: Ibn al-'Arabi's Book of the Fabulous Gryphon* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 175–79; Hofbeck, "Christological Doctrines in Islam," 185.

131 Ibn Taymiyya, *A Muslim Theologian's Response to Christianity: Ibn Taymiyya's al-Jawab al-sahih*, trans. Thomas F. Michel (Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1999), 308.

132 'Abd al-Jabbār, *The Critique of Christian Origins*, 105. See George F. Hourani, *Reason and Tradition in Islamic Ethics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1985), 109–17; Reynolds, *A Muslim Theologian*, 128–29, 131, 177, 227.

133 Hofbeck, "Christological Doctrines in Islam," 186–91; Mourad, "Twelfth-Century Muslim Biography," 42; Reynolds, *A Muslim Theologian*, 164–65; W. Montgomery Watt, "Ash-Shahrastani's Account of Christian Doctrine," *Islamochristiana* 9 (1983): 249–59.

134 *Tathbit dala'il al-nubuwwa* [Confirmation of the Proofs of Prophecy] is 'Abd al-Jabbar's work. Reynolds calls the part of it dealing with Christianity "the

persecuting Christians, he became a Christian himself to engineer a split between the Jews and Christians. The Jews surrendered him to the Roman authorities, whom he then turned against the Jews. By convincing the Roman Christians to ignore Jewish dietary laws and their circumcision requirement, Paul degraded Christianity into a mere Romanism. "If you scrutinize the matter," 'Abd al-Jabbar explained, "you will find that the Christians became Romans and fell back to the religions of the Romans. You will not find that the Romans became Christians." Similarly, Constantine "made an outward [show] of revering Christ and the Cross" but made no substantial change in the Roman religion, and Mani, "a liar and a deceiver," gave the Persians a Christianity watered down into Persianism. This was a plain-ken view of religion: Paul, Constantine, and Mani, driven by their own human psychologies, created false religions that only dimly reflected any deep-ken truth. In contrast, Jesus was beyond plain-ken expectations and "did not act in any way like us his whole life long." With a plain ken, 'Abd al-Jabbar recognized the gaps between Jesus and Christianity, and then intentionalized those differences and located them within history.<sup>135</sup> We will see more examples of this precocious Muslim plain ken when we examine canon (see Chapter 11).

In contrast, Muhammad ibn Yusuf al-Sanusi (ca. 1429–90) took a more deep-ken and philosophical approach. God and Jesus could not both be divine, because unity and plurality could not exist together. To refute the statement that some aspect of God united itself to the human nature of Jesus, al-Sanusi mostly recycled old arguments. The only explanation he thought might be plausible was to understand this union as the attachment of a human appearance (the "accident") to a divine substance, but even this he found impossible to reconcile with the Christian metaphysical understanding of the Trinity. Al-Sanusi shows that the medieval Islamic plain ken was never dominant enough to prevent later deep-ken argumentation.<sup>136</sup>

## Envoi

This, then, are the understandings of Jesus that had evolved by 1400. Muslims had the Jesus of the Qur'an, and Christians had the Jesus of the Bible. Each group might have been surprised by the amount of overlap, or horrified by the fundamental differences. Beyond these canonical accounts, we confront a riot of Muslim, Christian, and Manichaean apocrypha using additional knowledge to

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Critique."

135 'Abd al-Jabbār, *The Critique of Christian Origins*, 90–91, 100–09, 119–21. See Reynolds, *A Muslim Theologian*, 108–13, 163.

136 Hofbeck, "Christological Doctrines in Islam," 193–94.

flesh out, or fill holes in, the canons—such as explaining why Mary went to Egypt with a story about neighbours accusing Jesus of being a sorcerer and a bully.

Such accounts are today not well known to Jesus cultists, who would be more likely to dismiss them as medieval fantasy than to value them as new information. Today, even some historians outside the Jesus cult distinguish between the true, “historical” Jesus and such fantastic representations of him, which tell us more about the society that promulgated them than about the actual Jesus. Most cultists in 1400 would, perhaps, have been more nuanced in their thought: less hostile to the unlikely, and less certain of the accepted.

The idea of questing for a true, historical Jesus was neither contemplated, nor pursued. That is a plain-ken attitude that developed over the period this project studies. To be candid, my own plain-ken instincts push me to seek a historical Jesus lurking buried beneath the diversity of the details presented here, to find truth in accounts that are oldest or most widely spread or shared, to roll back the centuries to allow him to emerge. We do occasionally meet pre-1400 thinkers who approached the Jesus cult with the plain ken. Even if we disagree with his priorities and speculations, ‘Abd al-Jabbar wrote with a plain ken intelligible to a twenty-first-century historian.

## 4. The Many Lives of Jesus

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We moderns like texts. Jesus looms behind that preference. In the fifteenth century, a religious Reformation against the Church began in Christian Bohemia that emphasized looking at the Bible as a source of authority. That focus developed as the Reformation unfolded, eventually influencing both the established Church itself as well as members of the embryonic historical profession. The call of the instructor of a university history course to “cite your sources!” echoes the Bohemian reformers’ call to return—*ad fontes!*—“to the sources,” to find the most reliable teachings of Christian doctrine.

Jesus cultists collected data about him from a variety of sources. The Italian scholar Cecco d’Ascoli (ca. 1269–1327) had argued that one event in Jesus’s life, his birth, could be calculated entirely from his astrological horoscope. This was not a widespread belief—Cecco became the first university don executed after an inquisitional investigation—but suggests the ingenious paths taken in the pursuit of Jesus knowledge.<sup>1</sup> Other scholars used their knowledge of human biology to make conclusions about the physiology of Jesus’s gastrointestinal tract after his Resurrection. This, too, annoyed contemporaries such as the Lollards, although it was a Lollard who himself was able to derive all sorts of knowledge about Jesus solely from the fact that he chose fishermen as his disciples.<sup>2</sup> The deep ken could find an entire biography encoded in a grain of information.

The previous chapter offered a consensus narrative of Jesus’s life; this chapter examines some of the sources of the Jesus information available to his cultists in 1400. We begin with the Qur’an, to explain both its special nature and its importance for the Jesus cult. Turning beyond canon, we then consider unusual kinds of paracanonical Jesus-related written documents: charters that spoke in legal language, gospel harmonies that blended the four canonical gospels

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1 Giovanni Villani, *Nuova Cronica* (Florence: Celli e Ronchi, Gasparo Ricci, 1832), 63–64.

2 John Wycliffe, *Sermons on the Ferial Gospels and Sunday Epistles; Treatises*, in *Select English Works*, ed. Thomas Arnold, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1871), II, 136–37. See Anne Hudson, *The Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 218.

into a single narrative, a passage from a Timurid universal history, and a hostile retelling of the Jesus life from a Jewish perspective.

## Qur'an

Given its prominence in Islam, the most important Jesus-related book in 1400 might well have been the Qur'an. Unlike the gospels, the Qur'an is not trying to tell the story of Jesus's life, nor is it really intent on telling any story at all. The Qur'an's some 77,000 words are divided into 114 surahs, which are arranged in a rough order by decreasing length rather than by chronology: its deep-ken interest in beauty completely overshadowed any plain-ken priority for narrative. There are few proper names of people or places to root it in a clear temporal setting. We read the names of a half dozen peoples, mostly religious groups (Christians, Jews, Sabians, Magians) but sometimes not (Romans, Quraysh), and not many more place names, usually locations of battle or pilgrimage.<sup>3</sup> The aim is not historical; that is, a narrative might conclude before its climax, which might be in another surah, if at all. For example, when his disciples requested a feast from heaven, Jesus repeated the request to God, who replies, "I will send you down a feast from heaven"—but no shazam-verse "and so God sent down a feast from heaven" is recorded. When God promises action, the reader knows that action will happen, without any explicit report. Similarly, 3:49 explains that God would send Jesus who would do certain miracles, but the Qur'an does not record the completion of those miracles.<sup>4</sup>

Instead, the Qur'an is making an argument from awesome authority. The Qur'an self-identifies as light and as a revelation, a *tanzil*, literally a "sending down."<sup>5</sup> Through prophecy, God makes the unseen visible.<sup>6</sup> The Qur'an preserves the structure of its revelation: when God tells Muhammad to "Say x, y, and z," his prophet does not simply recite x, y, and z, but intones the full "Say x, y, and z." Like a Christian sacrament, an *ayah* is a visible "sign" or "evidence" of an invisible truth, a demonstrative manifestation of divine power. By extension, the word came to refer to verses of the Qur'an, the great and only miracle of Muhammad. A textual *ayah*, like any miracle, reminds the faithful of the truth of

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3 Michael Cook, *Muhammad* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1983), 69–70.

4 Jane Dammen McAuliffe, "An Introduction to Medieval Interpretation of the Quran," in *With Reverence for the Word: Medieval Scriptural Exegesis in Christianity, Judaism, and Islam*, ed. Joseph W. Goering, Jane Dammen McAuliffe and Barry Walfish (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003), 311–19 (317), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195137279.003.0020>

5 Qur'an 4:174, 17:105.

6 Qur'an 3:179, 72:26–27.

God. The Qur'an also distinguishes between first-hand experiential knowledge and revelation: regarding Mary, God told Muhammad, "This is an account of things beyond your knowledge that We reveal to you: You were not present..."<sup>7</sup>

The Egyptian scholar al-Suyuti (1445–1505) contextualized the Qur'an as a miracle in a history of miracles that stretched across the deep-plain-ken divide. The prophet Moses, he explained, miraculously transformed a staff into a snake, but this was a merely plain-ken miracle that occurred at a particular time and place. Because "what is perceived by the eye [...] disappears with the disappearance of the person seeing," such miracles had all "disappeared with the disappearance of their times, and so were only witnessed by their contemporaries." In contrast, the miracle of the Qur'an was permanent, and independent of time and space. Anyone, at any time and any place, could verify its truth. Even the standards of miracles changed through history: Moses impressed by performing magical miracles in an era of peak magic. Jesus impressed by performing healing miracles in an era of peak medicine. Muhammad's Qur'an impressed by being a speech-miracle in an era of peak eloquence.<sup>8</sup>

Although the Qur'an values deep-ken truth above plain-ken narrative, it recognizes that such truth was revealed in plain-ken time, and thus the two kens swirl in a complex relation around it. According to al-Suyuti, the Qur'an descended in two stages—first from the highest to the lowest heaven, and then it was given serially to Muhammad. The revelation has deep-ken strength, but, according to al-Suyuti, the process of listeners hearing and understanding a revelation occurred *in history*. The Qur'an knows of the Jewish Torah and the Christian Gospel, which it describes as "full of guidance and light."<sup>9</sup> Al-Suyuti noted that the Torah and the Gospel were also revealed in history, in two one-stage descents, during the month of Ramadan. In our terminology, al-Suyuti recognized a deep-ken revelation revealed in plain-ken circumstances.<sup>10</sup>

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7 Qur'an 3:44. See Daniel Madigan, "Themes and Topics," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Quran*, ed. McAuliffe (New York: Cambridge UP, 2006), 79–96 (85), <https://doi.org/10.1017/ccol0521831601.005>; Angelika Neuwirth, "Structural, Linguistic and Literary Features," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Quran*, ed. McAuliffe, 97–114 (98), <https://doi.org/10.1017/ccol0521831601.006>; John Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2004), 6–7.

8 Al-Suyuti, *Le parfait manuel des sciences coraniques al-Itqān fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān de Ġalāl ad-Dīn as-Suyūṭī* (849/1445–911/1505), trans. Michel Lagarde (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 1076–77, 1082.

9 Qur'an 5:46.

10 Al-Suyuti, *Le parfait manuel*, 105–91, esp. 161–69. See Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 36–37. Mirkhvand also described the Gospel as "sent down" to Jesus. Muhammad b. Khavandshah Mirkhvand, *The Rauzat-us-safa, or Garden of Purity*, trans. E.



In the Qur'an, "Jesus" appears twenty-five times.<sup>11</sup> More frequent are explicit references to the prophets Moses, Abraham, Noah, to Joseph, and to his own mother: Mary, the only woman mentioned by name, occurs thirty-four times. Jesus's name occurs five times as often as Muhammad's. Non-name references to Jesus, by his titles for example, total almost two hundred. This is comparable to the frequency of explicit, named references to Jesus in the Bible, and exceeds the number of those to his mother:

- 7.57% of chapters of the Bible refer explicitly to "Jesus"
- 6.14% of chapters of the Qur'an refer explicitly to "Jesus"
- 0.12% of the verses of the Bible refer explicitly to "Jesus"
- 0.03% of the verses of the Qur'an refer explicitly to "Jesus"
- 0.15% of the verses of the Bible refer explicitly to "Mary"
- 0.50% of the verses of the Qur'an refer explicitly to "Mary"

Such statistics depend on perspective. A plain ken would point out that including Old Testament books is problematic, since Jesus could not have appeared in them. A deep ken would object that restricting the view to "explicit" references ignores the many implicit references to Jesus in the Old Testament before he was born. In any case, from my professional-historian plain ken, Jesus and Mary saturate the Christian canon about as much as the Muslim canon.

In addition, the Qur'an was physically more important to the Muslim subcult than the Bible was to the Christian subcult. An extensive literature (*adab al-Qur'an*) on handling the Qur'an developed, often extrapolating from Muhammad's own practice. Special bookstands were fashioned for displaying the Qur'an, and dedicated wooden boxes for holding canon.<sup>12</sup>

## Bible

On the other hand, the Bible was not as important in Christianity in 1400 as it would be in 1800. There was little exposure to the Bible. In his sermons, Jean Gerson (1363–1429), the Chancellor of the University of Paris, rarely referred to Bible passages. He more frequently reinforced his points with reference to miracles and narrative stories. If you wanted to buy a Bible, his university was

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Rehatsek, ed. F. F. Arbutnot, 3 vols. (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1892), III, 161, 178.

11 Qur'an 1–6, 9, 19, 21, 23, 33, 42–43, 61, 112.

12 Colin F. Baker, *Qur'an Manuscripts: Calligraphy, Illumination* (London: British Library, 2007) 106–09; David James, *Qur'āns of the Mamlūks* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1988), 33, 177; Anna M. Gade, "Recitation," in *Blackwell Companion to the Quran*, ed. Andrew Rippin (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), 481–93 (488).

selling some from its library, which owned more than it needed. Gerson was annoyed by the popular fourteenth-century *Tree of Life of the Crucified Jesus* by Ubertino of Casale (1259–ca. 1329), but not because it went beyond the Biblical canon. Rather, Gerson objected to Ubertino’s failure to acknowledge the authors of those extra-Biblical sources: “Often he selects and snatches large parts in his own form, staying silent about the authors’ names. We don’t know if he wants to be Aesop’s crow, decorating himself with other birds’ feathers.”<sup>13</sup> For Gerson, sources for Jesus’s life, Biblical and extra-Biblical alike, were valuable both as “sacred” and “authentic.”<sup>14</sup>

Biblical content was less prominent in Bibles than it was in oral public worship, in the liturgy. The Bible was most often consumed during worship, processed in fragments, in liturgical units. Even a reader keen to consult the Bible directly would often be physically handling only one part of it at a time, as its different books were often bound separately, sometimes also the case for Qur’ans. A one-volume Bible, a “pandect,” was extraordinary, and used mostly for reference. It was also an exceptional reader who thought of the intertextuality of the various Bible components, or of their relationship to the canon as a whole. The more important Christian books were for the liturgy. In terms of numbers, the thirteenth century saw the missal overtake the gospels. The paramount single Jesus book in Christendom in 1400 was the Book of Hours, which was mostly a tool for oral prayer. Books of Hours were more popular even than the Psalter, itself a key Bible book because of its importance in the liturgy.<sup>15</sup>

We can reinforce this point by looking at estate inventories. At his death in 1416, John, Duke of Berry’s (1340–1416) library had fifteen Bibles—but fifty-five liturgical books, and that number would have been even higher had he not recently given eight missals to the Sainte-Chapelle in his Bourges palace.<sup>16</sup> In contrast, the vizier Rashid al-Din Hamadani (1247–1318) had a collection

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- 13 Jean Gerson to Jean Bassandi, in *Oeuvres complètes* [OC], ed. Palémon Glorieux, 10 vols. (Paris: Desclée et Cie, 1960), II, 185–86.
  - 14 These key terms occur throughout his writings, but see, for example, OC, VIII, 113, 380–81 and OC, X, 142, 186, 215.
  - 15 G. R. Evans, *Language and Logic of the Bible: The Road to Reformation* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1985), 69, <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511555237>; Raphael Loewe, “The Medieval History of the Latin Vulgate,” in *Cambridge History of the Bible*, ed. G. W. H. Lampe, 3 vols. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1992), II, 102–54 (108–09); Francis Wormald, “Bible Illustration in Medieval Manuscripts,” in *Cambridge History of the Bible*, ed. Lampe, II, 309–37 (321–26); Jesse Keskiaho, “Bortom fragmenten: Handskriftsproduktion och boklig kultur i det medeltida Åbo stift,” *Historisk Tidskrift för Finland* 93 (2008): 209–52.
  - 16 Raymond Cazelles and Johannes Rathofer, *Illuminations of Heaven and Earth: The Glories of the Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry* (New York: Abrams, 1988), 86, 203.

of exactly one thousand Qur'ans mentioned in his will.<sup>17</sup> Note that the round number one thousand would arouse suspicion in a modern, plain-ken-inclined historian, but would have inspired a deep-ken sense of appropriateness in the vizier himself.

## Paracanon

Jesus material was also available outside the Bible and the Qur'an canons. We can find it prominently spoken in the liturgy, memorized by celebrants,<sup>18</sup> in commentaries, in religious drama, in visual art, in quotations or paraphrases preserved in ancient texts by the Church Fathers—such as the *Diatessaron*, a gospel harmony written by the Assyrian Tatian (ca. 120–80), which survived into our period in a variety of translations, in medieval English, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Persian, Latin, Syriac, Greek, Armenian, and Coptic.<sup>19</sup> The vast majority (90%) of extant medieval parodies concern the Church or the Bible, a fact only partially explained by many of their authors being churchmen.<sup>20</sup>

Let us consider some accounts of Jesus outside the canon. In general, these either summarize the canonical information, or provide richer (deep ken) or local (plain ken) context. The German poet-musician Oswald von Wolkenstein (1376/77–1445) crafted a version of the Crucifixion in which the soldier Longinus was a blind spear, who regained his sight when blood and water spurted from Jesus's side wound into Longinus's eyes. This might have resonated especially with Oswald, who had lost his own right eye. Oswald deepened the gospel story by presenting Longinus as both Jewish, to show the deeper truth of the Jews' treachery, and blind, to show the deeper truth of the possibility of revelation. That poem ends with a Latin curse, meaning "May all be confounded who persecute us." Oswald elsewhere presented Jesus as a prince, reflecting a deeper truth than the humble origins reported in the Gospel.<sup>21</sup>

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17 James, *Qur'āns of the Mamlūks*, 127–28.

18 Jean Leclercq, "From Gregory the Great to St. Bernard," in *Cambridge History of the Bible*, ed. Lampe, II, 183–97 (196); Beryl Smalley, "The Bible in the Medieval Schools," in *Cambridge History of the Bible*, ed. Lampe, II, 197–219 (207–08).

19 Harvey McArthur, *The Quest Through the Centuries: The Search for the Historical Jesus* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1966), 40; Bruce Metzger and Bart Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration* (New York: Oxford UP, 2005), 91.

20 Martha Bayless, *Parody in the Middle Ages: The Latin Tradition* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 12, <https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.14561>

21 Oswald von Wolkenstein, *The Poems of Oswald von Wolkenstein*, trans. Albrecht Classen (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 192–96, 207–09, 222–23, <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230617179>

Paracanonical new information could also come from a plain-ken sensibility. In the fifteenth century, there surfaced in Toledo a letter, ostensibly written in the first century, revealing that local, Toledan Jews had in fact *opposed* the Jerusalem Jews' execution of Jesus.<sup>22</sup> Thus a historical document, valuable in the plain-ken outlook, proved that the Toledo Jews should be spared any punishment appropriate for the Jerusalem Jews. A modern historian might be suspicious of such a convenient discovery; that same plain-ken suspicion is a descendant of the Toledan Jews' enthusiasm for, or fabrication of, this putatively historical document.

The paracanonical accounts appeared in a variety of genres and formats, even if we restrict our gaze to the Muslim subcult. Some manuscripts collected hadith, in which Jesus made appearances, often giving teachings or performing miracles. *Qisas al-Anbiya* [Stories of the Prophets] included Jesus along with the other prophets; these were especially influential in the Persianate world, perhaps because of an earlier Buddhist tradition of lives of saints.<sup>23</sup> The Life of Jesus, with his miracles in the spotlight, found its way into the world history *Mujmal-tawarikh* [Compendium of History] of Hafiz-i Abru (d. 1430), which had been commissioned by the Timurid prince Shah Rukh (1377–1447).<sup>24</sup> Jesus also appeared in a supporting role in the various texts known as *Mi'rajnama* [Book of the Night Journey], which recount Muhammad's ascent into the heavens, and probably influenced the *Divine Comedy* of Dante (ca. 1265–1321).<sup>25</sup>

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- 22 "Carta que fiz traducir de caldeo en latin e romance el noble Rey Don Alfonso que la vila de Toledo conquirio e yaze en el armario del aiuntamiento de Toledo," in *Colección de privilegios concernientes a Toledo*, Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional, MS 838, fol. 3rv. See Adam G. Beaver, "Nebuchadnezzar's Jewish Legions: Sephardic Legends' Journey from Biblical Polemic to Humanist History," in *After Conversion: Iberia and the Emergence of Modernity*, ed. Mercedes García-Arenal (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 21–65, [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004324329\\_003](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004324329_003); David Nirenberg, "Mass Conversion and Genealogical Mentalities: Jews and Christians in Fifteenth-Century Spain," *Past & Present* 174 (2002): 3–14, <https://doi.org/10.1093/past/174.1.3>
- 23 Miriam Y. Perkins, "Islamic Images of Isa/Jesus in the Chester Beatty Manuscript Collection: Visual Art as Framework for Comparative Christology," *Religion and the Arts* 16 (2012): 488–506 (500), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/15685292-12341236>
- 24 Detached folio from a *Mujmal-tawarikh*, 1426; r: Jesus and Sam; v: text, Arthur M. Sackler Gallery S1986.132, Smithsonian Institute, Washington, DC, <https://asia.si.edu/object/S1986.132/>. Some of the content derives from the *Jami' al-tawarikh* [Compendium of Chronicles] of Rashid al-Din Hamadani (d. 1318). See Thomas W. Lentz and Glenn D. Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision: Persian Art and Culture in the Fifteenth Century* (Los Angeles, CA: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1989), 99.
- 25 Bridget Pupillo, "Sotto 'l velame: The *Commedia*, The *Kitab al-Mi'raj* and Apocalyptic Tradition" (PhD thesis, Johns Hopkins University, 2012).

## Gospel Harmonies

Over the long term, the most influential paracanonical accounts of Jesus were the “Gospel Harmonies” that sought to consolidate the four gospels into a single biographical narrative of Jesus’s life, a plain-ken motivation which anticipated a more modern historical sensibility. The thirteenth century saw the composition of several such Lives that remained popular in 1400, when a new, but smaller, wave began, including Gerson’s (ca. 1400) and the scholarship of al-Biqā’i (1407–80), who synthesized the Christian gospels in the course of his critique of Christian doctrine.

Other works took their own idiosyncratic approaches. In his *De gestis Domini Salvatoris* [Concerning the Deeds of the Lord and Saviour] (ca. 1338–48), Simone Fidati (ca. 1295–48) declined to use apocrypha and preferred to linger on Jesus’s speeches rather than his deeds. Fidati’s version in its day was quite popular, copied from Holland to Austria.<sup>26</sup> Isabel de Villena (1430–90), the aunt of Queen Isabella I of Castile (1451–1504), wrote a Life of Christ that abandoned a great deal of chronological narrative, as well as the centrality of Jesus, who was repeatedly upstaged by the various women in his life. In terms of format, particularly striking is Guido de Perpignan’s (ca. 1270–1342) *Quattuor Unum—Hoc Est Concordia Evangelica* [Four From One, that is Agreement of the Gospels] (1300), which found and displayed its harmony’s text in parallel horizontal rows.

A highly influential synthesis was the *Meditations on the Life of Christ* long attributed to Bonaventure (1221–74). Although now often linked to a fourteenth-century Franciscan named Johannes de Caulibus, I follow the more cautious approach of describing its author as “Pseudo-Bonaventure.” His understanding of the gospels and the historical world behind them leaned towards the deep ken. Because multiple gospels reported Jesus expelling money changers from the Jerusalem Temple, Jesus must have in fact expelled them multiple times. He ignores Jesus’s longer speeches “because these expositions do not always seem to benefit meditations.” In general, he adopts a sophisticated attitude to the gospels, interested in their application rather than the trivialities of some impossible “historical truth,” the plain-ken playing out of how actions happened to happen. Instead, he works out how Jesus’s actions *should* have happened—what actions best consonate with each other, with the true nature of Jesus, and with the needs of the reader. In his prologue, he advises the reader:

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26 Simone Fidati, *De gestis domini salvatoris in quatuor evangelistas* (Cologne: Eucharius Cervicornus, 1540).

You must not believe that all things said and done by Him on which we may meditate are known to us in writing. For the sake of the greater impressiveness I shall tell them to you as they occurred or as they might have occurred according to the devout belief of the imagination and the varying interpretation of the mind [...] Thus when you find it said here, "This was said and done by the Lord Jesus," and by others of whom we read, if it cannot be demonstrated by the Scriptures, you must consider it only as a requirement of devout contemplation. Take it as if I had said, "Suppose that this is what the Lord Jesus said and did" and also for similar things.

This disinterest in a narrow plain-ken historical truth allowed beauty to resonate throughout the work. Taking evidence from a reference in the Psalms (45:2 [44:3]), Pseudo-Bonaventure explains that Jesus is most "beautiful in form above all sons of men." His teachings were "beautiful things," and his sermon "very beautiful and generous"—because, the text explains, it came from his mouth, itself beautiful as well. Some four dozen examples of the word "beauty" (*pulchritudo*, in various forms) appear in the text.<sup>27</sup>

Some of his deep-ken logic gets Pseudo-Bonaventure into difficulties, or at least convolutions. First, he sees a problem with Jn 5:19 ("the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing"). If Jesus Christ, the Son, does what the Father does, and the Father has the Son, then the Son has the Son, which is absurd. Bonaventure avoids the absurdity by deciding that "having a Son" is more a relationship than an activity, and so the Son need not copy the Father. That this is even a problem may seem odd to us, an odd use of a context-blind logic, and we might place his solution somewhere between common sense and an equally uncommon logic. Such arguments, imported into theology from geometry, were thought to be particularly valuable because they were particularly reliable. Geometry, like theology, refers to deep-ken truths, so this interdisciplinarity makes sense. Second, Bonaventure tries to reconcile Jn 6:2 ("a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the signs he had performed") with Jn 6:26 ("Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill"): perhaps the first verse refers to some people, and the second to

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27 Pseudo-Bonaventure, *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, trans. Isa Ragusa and Rosalie B. Green (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1961), 5, 41, 151–55, 277. The Latin is at Iohannis de Caulibus, *Meditaciones vite Christi olim S. Bonaventuro attributae* (Brepols: Turnhout, 1997), 10, 36, 101, 265. See *Instrumenta lexicologica Latina. Series A, Formae, Fasc. 93, Iohannes de Caulibus Meditaciones vite Christi* (Brepols: Turnhout, 2000), 85.

others, or perhaps they each refer to different times.<sup>28</sup> That is, where the deep ken gets stuck, the plain ken can reconcile the contradiction by imagining a wider historical context.

Indeed, Pseudo-Bonaventure does some historical analysis, despite his assertions of a relaxed attitude towards history, as when he concludes from the absence of information about Jesus's life from age twelve to twenty-nine that nothing important happened then. He also shows his authorities, although accepting a broader range than a modern biography would accept: "I do not intend to affirm anything in this little book that is not asserted or said by Holy Scripture or the word of the saints or by approved opinion."<sup>29</sup>

In contrast, Ludolph of Saxony (ca. 1295–1378) sometimes assumed that two gospels' separate narratives of similar events were in fact the same event, a plain-ken perspective that envisioned a single historical reality behind the text. He made use of apocryphal texts, but considered them less authoritative and flagged them as such.<sup>30</sup>

Nicholas Love (d. ca. 1424) was the prior of the Carthusians' Mount Grace Charterhouse in the 1410s. His enduring fame rested on his *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*. The inspiration for this work came from Pseudo-Bonaventure's *Meditations* on the life of Jesus, meditative teachings sorted into seven days of the week. While Ludolph expanded the *Meditations*, Love mostly abbreviated them, adapting them for the "symple creatures" of his intended audience. Love praised the Lives of Christ genre for being "plainer" in some passages than the gospels themselves.<sup>31</sup>

We have an unusual opportunity to understand the process of creating a Life in the reflections of Gerson. His goal was to reduce the variety of the gospels into a single unitary Life. Indeed, he mused, the most appropriate of all unities was the true Gospel. Gerson admitted that he could not create a properly historical, synthetic gospel; the best he could do was to make what he called a "probable collation."<sup>32</sup> (See Chapter 12.)

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28 Bonaventure, *Commentarius in Evangelium Ioannis*, in *Opera Omnia*, ed. Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 10 vols. (Florence: Quaracchi, 1893), VI, 310, 326. See Evans, *Language and Logic*, 118–20.

29 Pseudo-Bonaventure, *Meditations*, 94–102, 317–20; de Caulibus, *Meditaciones*, 64–72, 252–55.

30 Ludolphus de Saxonia, *Vita Jesu Christi*, ed. L. M. Rigollot, 4 vols. (Paris: Palmé, 1878).

31 Nicholas Love, *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, ed. Michael G. Sargent (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2004), 10.

32 Jean Gerson, "Monotesaron," in *L'oeuvre Doctrinale*, OC, IX, 246–48. See Marijke H. De Lang, "Jean Gerson's Harmony of the Gospels (1420)," *Nederlands archief voor kerkgeschiedenis* 71 (1991): 37–49; Mary Raschko, "Re-forming the Life of Christ," in *Europe after Wyclif*, ed. J. Patrick Hornbeck II and Michael van Dussen (New York: Fordham UP, 2017), 288–308.

The image shows a page from an Ethiopian manuscript. At the top, there is a decorative archway with a colorful geometric pattern and several birds perched on it. Below the archway is a table with eight columns and many rows. The text is in Ge'ez script. The first row of the table is highlighted in red and contains numbers in the margins. The table is framed by a decorative border with a zig-zag pattern.

Fig. 4.1 Ethiopian canon table (ca. 1400), Walters MS 1.838, fol. 1r, Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, <https://www.thedigitalwalters.org/Data/WaltersManuscripts/html/W838/description.html>

The most powerful representation of an underlying unity behind the four gospels was visual and analytical. Eusebius of Caesarea (d. 339) had developed a series of ten tables that linked each passage to its parallels in the other gospels. This canon table (Fig. 4.1), from a ca. 1400 Ethiopian gospel manuscript, lists passages common to all four gospels. The eight columns are actually a repeated set of four, labelled Matthew (ማቴዎስ), Mark (ማርቆስ), Luke (ሉቃስ), and John (ዮሐንስ). The first line, in the first red-bordered row of four lines, gives the number of the passage in each gospel that links John the Baptist to the “voice in the wilderness” passage from Isaiah (40:3): Matthew’s #8 (፰), Mark’s #2 (፮), Luke’s #7 (፯), and John’s #10 (፲). Those numbers are noted in the margins of the text itself, corresponding to passages we identify today as Mt 3:3, Mk 1:3, Lk 3:3-6, and Jn 1:23. Other tables list passages common to triplets (e.g., Matthew, Mark, and Luke, but not John) and to pairs of gospels. A reader could use these tables to jump between parallel passages, like the hyperlinks in today’s digital Bibles.<sup>33</sup>

33 See Matthew R. Crawford, *The Eusebian Canon Tables: Ordering Textual Knowledge in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2019); Martin Wallraff, “A



A different approach to synthesizing the gospels' variety was the Jesus genealogy, which existed in many formats. One ca. 1460 manuscript, produced in Slovakia, of a fourteenth-century Italian world chronicle includes just such a genealogy chart for Jesus (see Fig. 4.2).<sup>34</sup> It attempts to represent the complexities of the clues of the gospels in a clear form. Some of the extra-biblical connections it signals are explained by ancient tradition; others might be deduced logically from the importance of the people involved. Jesus Christ is at the bottom-centre, beneath the Virgin Mary, in turn beneath her father Joachim, who is beneath his wife Anne, at the chart's centre. Joseph floats to the left of Mary, but is linked neither to her nor to Jesus. His own ambiguous paternity (Luke's and Matthew's accounts differ) is indicated: one line, in red, links back to Heli and beyond to Matthan, and a second to Jacob. An ancient descent line debated by Celsus and Origen finds Joachim's ancestors in Barpanthera, son of Panther, son of Levi.<sup>35</sup> Two other Biblical Marys, Mary of Clopas and Mary mother of the sons of Zebedee, and their families flank the Virgin on either side.

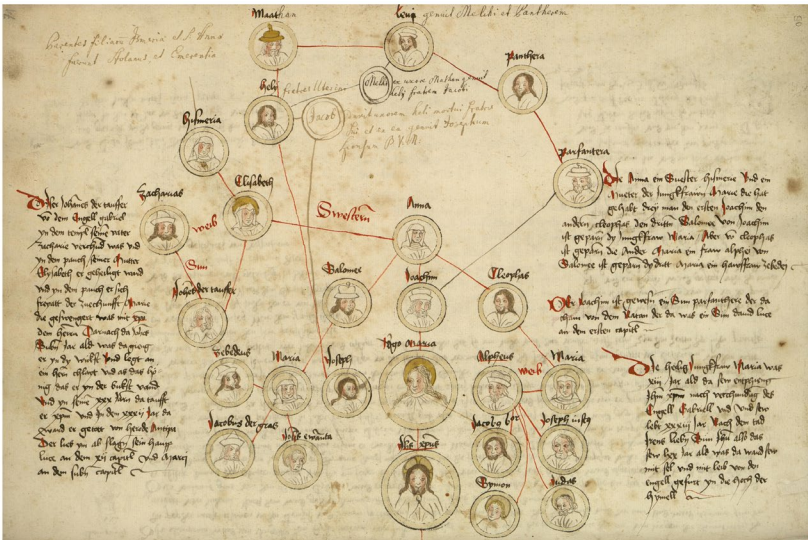


Fig. 4.2 *Genealogy of Jesus* (1458–62), Giovanni da Udine, *Weltchronik*, Slovenská národná knižnica, MS J 324, p. 50, World Digital Library, [https://www.loc.gov/resource/gdcwdl.wdl\\_14218/?sp=60](https://www.loc.gov/resource/gdcwdl.wdl_14218/?sp=60)

List in Three Dimensions: The Case of Eusebius's Canon Tables of the Gospels," *Synopses and Lists: Textual Practices in the Pre-Modern World*, ed. Teresa Bernheimer and Ronny Vollandt (Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2023), 191–214 (195–201), <https://doi.org/10.11647/obp.0375.07>

34 Giovanni da Udine, *Weltchronik*, Slovenská národná knižnica, MS J 324, p. 50.

35 See Johann Nepomuk Sepp, *Das Leben Christi*, 7 vols. (Regensburg: Manz, 1843), I, part 2, 288–90.

Two unusual Lives were composed in Iberia. The Carthusian Juan de Padilla (1468–1522) wrote a long Dantesque poem called the “Retablo de la vida de Cristo” [Altarpiece of the Life of Christ], a tangle of unguents and tears, cleaning and kissing, hair and feet, in octets of thirteen-syllable lines (*tridecasílabo*) of an unaccented syllable followed by four dactyls.<sup>36</sup> The “Carajicomedia” [Prick Comedy] (ca. 1504), allegedly created by a Franciscan translator of Ludolph of Saxony’s *Life of Christ*, as a form of recovery after his literary exertions, takes language from the *Life* and reapplies it to an account of sexual escapades. The result is a mash-up of the devotional and the erotic. One sex worker quotes Jesus (Jn 6:37’s “whoever comes to me I will never drive away”); another, given counterfeit money, recreates Peter’s denial of Christ in Mt 26:74. It uses the language of Jesus’s Resurrection to describe bodily risings of a less holy variety. With this text the deep ken hears dissonance, perhaps deepening the salaciousness, between the Jesus language and the bawdy subject.<sup>37</sup>

Drawing from Ludolph of Saxony and Pseudo-Bonaventure, the Devout (see Chapter 20) wrote their own Lives of Jesus. The most famous example of this scholarship was the anonymous Latin manuscript *De Imitatione Christi* [The Imitation of Christ] (ca. 1418–27), attributed to Thomas à Kempis (ca. 1380–1471), a Brother of the Common Life. This work built on the reader’s love of God to create a personal, mystical relationship. The manuscript inherited its title from that of its first chapter, “The Imitation of Christ and Contempt for the Vanities of the World.” It emphasizes silence, solitude, rejecting external temptations, and “taking up the Cross” which is “always in readiness for you and everywhere awaits you.” The text describes this engagement in three-dimensional spatial terms: “Gaze upwards and downwards, look inside you and outside you and everywhere you will find the cross.” Only the first of four pamphlets of the *Imitation of Christ* were written by ca. 1420, but it was printed in the 1470s, and almost a thousand copies of the *Imitation* from the fifteenth century survive today.<sup>38</sup> By 1500, over a hundred editions had been printed, in

36 *Retablo dela vida de Cristo fecho en metro por un devoto frayle de la cartuxa* [Altarpiece of the Life of Christ Composed in Meter by a Devout Friar of the Carthusian Order].

37 Frank A. Domínguez, ed. and trans., *Carajicomedia: Parody and Satire in Early Modern Spain* (Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2015), <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781782046974>. See Ryan D. Giles, *The Laughter of the Saints: Parodies of Holiness in late Medieval and Renaissance Spain* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 25–32.

38 Thomas à Kempis, *Opera Omnia*, ed. Henricus Sommalius, 3 vols. (Cologne: Bousquet, 1759), I, 29; Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, trans. Joseph N. Tylenda (New York: Vintage, 1998), 3, 66–68. The title is *De Imitatione Christi et contemptu omnium vanitatum mundi* [On the Imitation of Christ and the Contempt of All the Vanities of the World]. The reference is to Jn 8:12: “Whoever follows Me will not walk into darkness.” A motto associated with Thomas à Kempis, but

five languages. It remains one of the most-translated books today. The Devout's influence was felt even in the fifteenth century; their students included Nicholas of Cusa (1401–64) and Desiderius Erasmus (1466–1536).

## Charters

Perhaps the least modern paracanonical genre is the charter, a formal legal document defining two parties' rights, which, in its Jesus form, was particularly popular in the lands around the Irish Sea.<sup>39</sup> Christians drew up these charters to consonate with Jesus's role as the charter that granted salvation. The early-fifteenth-century "Short Charter of Christ" exists today in twenty-four manuscript copies, including most famously BodL MS Ashmole 61 (ca. 1500). It is related to similar texts, such as the "Carta dei" and the "Long Charter of Christ." A charter had tremendous authority in contemporary England, and the "Short Charter" is a legal presentation of the Jesus's Passion, complete with legal language and seals. It may be a manifestation of the interpretation of Jesus's last words to his disciples (Mt 28, Mk 16, Acts 1) as a kind of will. Most of the manuscripts end with something like

And for more security  
The wound in my side, the seal it is  
This was given at Calvary  
Dated the first day of the great mercy.

Ashmole 61 has a drawn seal, "a heraldic shield bearing four suns in each corner and a fifth in the centre," suggesting the five wounds of Jesus.<sup>40</sup> Similar charters

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not known to be recorded before the eighteenth century, runs, "In all things I sought peace, but did not find it, except in nooks and books." The first half was in Latin, and the "except" clause, appropriately, in the Dutch vernacular. See Koen Goudriaan, "Empowerment through Reading, Writing, and Example: The *Devotio moderna*," in *Christianity in Western Europe, c.1100–c.1500*, ed. Miri Rubin and Walter Simons, Cambridge History of Christianity 4 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2010), 407–19 (412–16); John Van Engen, *Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life: The Devotio Moderna and the World of the Later Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 9, 80.

- 39 On charters, see Salvador Ryan, "'Scarce Anyone Survives a Heart Wound': The Wounded Christ in Irish Bardic Religious Poetry," in *Wounds and Wound Repair in Medieval Culture*, ed. Larissa Tracy and Kelly DeVries (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 291–312 (300–02), [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004306455\\_015](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004306455_015)
- 40 BL MS Ashmole 61, fol. 106r has the seal. See Robert R. Raymo, "Middle English Works of Religious and Philosophical Instruction," in *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English: 1050–1500*, ed. Albert E. Hartung, 10 vols. (New Haven, CT: Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1986), VII, 2343–44; Mary Caroline Spalding, *The Middle English Charters of Christ* (Bryn Mawr:

exist in Irish, including a ca. 1462 prose translation of the English-language “Long Charter.” In some Irish versions, the number of wounds inflates to 5460 or 6666. The Irish also adapted the text to local society by describing Jesus’s death in terms of *éiric*, “blood-price,” a reference to the traditional Gaelic principle of compensation.<sup>41</sup>

This followed an older tradition of understanding Jesus’s wounds as the “true” seals. A preacher’s handbook from a century earlier explains:

Notice that a charter that is written in blood carries with it extreme reliability and produces much admiration. Just such a charter did Christ write for us on the cross when he who was “beautiful above the sons of men” stretched out his blessed body, as a parchment-maker can be seen to spread a hide in the sun. In this way Christ, when his hands and feet were nailed to the cross, offered his body like a charter to be written on. The nails in his hands were used as a quill, and his precious blood as ink. And thus, with this charter he restored to us our heritage that we had lost.<sup>42</sup>

The visible, material seal drew its power through consonance with the perfect eternal seal. Thus, Jesus’s blood shed centuries earlier in the deep ken reinforced the authority of this charter as a legal document.

We can see this process visually in a heart illustrating a Jesus charter in a fifteenth-century English manuscript. Jesus here displays a legal document stipulating the terms of the contract between himself and humanity: repent your sins, love God, and love your neighbour, and heaven will be yours. Jesus’s heart appears on the seal that authorizes the agreement.<sup>43</sup>

This same legalistic approach to Jesus’s life underlies verse Passion retellings of the Irish poet Tadg Óg Ó hUiginn (ca. 1370–1448). In each retelling, he presents the Passion story to one key person or object from the story itself.

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Bryn Mawr College, 1914), 12; George Shuffelton, ed., *Codex Ashmole 61: A Compilation of Popular Middle English Verse* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2008), 512, 522–24, <https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/publication/shuffelton-codex-ashmole-61> and <https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/shuffelton-codex-ashmole-61-short-charter-of-christ-introduction>

41 Andrew Breeze, “The Charter of Christ in Medieval English, Welsh and Irish,” *Celtica* 19 (1987): 111–20 (116, 119).

42 Siegfried Wenzel, ed., *Fasciculus Morum: A Fourteenth-Century Preacher’s Handbook* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State UP, 1989), 213.

43 BL Add. MS 37049, fol. 23r. See Francis Wormald, “Some Popular Miniatures and Their Rich Relatives,” in *Miscellanea Pro Arte: Hermann Schnitzler zur Vollendung des 60. Lebensjahres am 13. Januar 1965* (Dusseldorf: Schwann, 1965), 279–81; Nigel Morgan, “Longinus and the Wounded Heart,” *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte* 46–47 (1994): 507–18 (515).

In each case, a fear of punishment motivates him to seek the protection of his addressee. He tells John the Apostle how much Jesus loved him (“He gave thee His secrets; His knee was thy pillow”), in order to acquire a “warrant” (or spokesman) from him against Jesus’s wrath at Judgment. He pleads for John the Baptist’s support, while repeatedly stressing John’s kin relations with potential advocates. Anxious about his own sins, themselves facilitated by the five senses “betraying” him, he even asks the cross to defend him at Judgment: “Remember, we beseech thee, the back of the hand fixed to thy blood-stained wood, the foot pouring blood, the pierced body stretched on thee.” The cross, he explains, is a sealed charter offering legal protection.<sup>44</sup>

### A Timurid Synthetic History

One Islamicate world history contains a synthetic Jesus Life that drew from an even broader collection of sources. In Timurid Herat, the historian Mirkhvand (1433/34–1498) began composing what would become the multi-volume *Rawzat al-Safa* [Gardens of Purity].<sup>45</sup> Islamicate history writing was then at a crossroads. Mainstream medieval Muslim tradition, taking its cues from Aristotle (384–322 BC), thought history too dependent on singular, particular, impermanent occurrences—rather than on universal patterns—to be a theoretical science. History was, that is to say, too oriented towards the plain ken. Some historians used the deep ken to recover, buried beneath the particulars of history, precisely those universal patterns.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, Mirkhvand refers to *qibla*, mosque, and Islam, but all of these are contemporary (to Muhammad) ways of expressing phenomena present at the time of Jesus: the *mizrah*, the temple, and true religion.

44 Tadh Óg Ó hUiginn, *Dán Dé: The Poems of Donnchadh Mór Ó Dálaigh and the Religious Poems in the Duanaire of the Yellow Book of Lecan*, ed. L. McKenna (Dublin: Educational Company of Ireland, 1922), 69–70, 72–74, 88–89. See John E. Murphy, “The Religious Mind of the Irish Bards,” in *Féilsgrábhinn Eóin Mhic Néill*, ed. John Ryan (Dublin: At the Sign of the Three Candles, 1940), 82–86.

45 Mirkhvand, *The Rauzat-us-safa*, II, 149–84.

46 Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. David Ross (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998), 102–17; Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. Hugh Lawson-Tancred (London: Penguin, 2004), 3–6 (Alpha 1). See Ali M. Ansari, “Mirkhvānd and Persian Historiography,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 26 (2016): 249–59, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1356186315000474>; Pedro Moura Carvalho, *Mir’āt Al-Quds (Mirror of Holiness): A Life of Christ for Emperor Akbar* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 63; Stephen Frederic Dale, *The Orange Trees of Marrakesh* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2015), 1–10, <https://doi.org/10.4159/9780674495807>; Muhsin Mahdi, *Ibn Khaldūn’s Philosophy of History: A Study in the Philosophic Foundation of the Science of Culture* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 138–39; Christopher Markiewicz, “History as Science: The Fifteenth-Century Debate in Arabic and Persian,” *Journal of Early Modern History* 21 (2017): 216–40, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/15700658-12342525>

For Mirkhvand, history was the accumulation of experience and wisdom. If “ignorant persons” should condemn history as “mere fictions and fables of the ancients, commingling truth with falsehood and right with wrong,” Mirkhvand answers that we can rely on past historians, who were too “virtuous” to “have taken fiction and untruthfulness as their motto.” Historians must be honest and pious, as their salvation depends upon it. Thus “everything handed down to posterity by them is free from defects and imperfections.” Nevertheless, he notes that even false histories could potentially have “great advantage and profit,” and concludes by consigning ultimate knowledge of true and false to a higher power, for “Allah, however, is most wise!”<sup>47</sup>

What does a Jesus Life synthesized by a pious historian look like? Mirkhvand’s Jesus was clearly in the ascetic tradition. He wore wool, was always travelling, and remained mindful of death and the impermanence of worldly things. He never planned ahead about lodging or food, but when night came would sleep wherever he was, with the darkness his canopy, the earth his bed, and a stone his pillow. The stone-pillow he finally gave up, throwing it at Satan who mocked the stone as a token of Jesus’s still-too-luxurious lifestyle. Eventually his disciples won his permission to purchase a mount, but planning for that animal’s food and water was too distracting for Jesus, who gave him back: “I stand not in need of a thing that attracts my heart...”<sup>48</sup>

The asceticism powered the ability to heal. Jesus’s trademark miracle was resurrecting the dead, but often that demonstration of power did not end well. The cases with animals were the most successful: he asked herders for a sheep and a cow, both of which he resurrected and returned after eating them. In Syria, he reluctantly resurrected the son of an oppressive king. However, the locals, fearing a prolongation of the royal family’s tyranny, revolted and killed father and son. Jesus resurrected another man to assuage his mother’s grief, but the “agonies of death” were so great to the son that Jesus agreed to let him die again. A similar episode occurred in the Kingdom of Nusaybin, to which Jesus dispatched his disciples Thomas and Simon to prepare his way. After outraging local authority by declaring Jesus the “spirit of Allah, and His word, His servant, and His messenger,” Thomas was arrested, blinded, mutilated, and then dumped on a dunghill. Simon went to interview Thomas, asking his reasons for making such a declaration, and refuting them. Jesus heals the blind? So do physicians. He animates clay birds? So do sorcerers. Only Thomas’s mention of Jesus’s Resurrections seems to impress Simon as persuasive. Simon then arranged for Jesus to appear before the king to do a series of miracles, starting with healing Thomas and correctly guessing what the king’s attendants had

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47 Mirkhvand, *The Rauzat-us-safa*, I, 25–31.

48 Mirkhvand, *The Rauzat-us-safa*, II, 163, 177.

eaten the previous evening. Jesus then asked his audience to choose a kind of bird, any kind, and they, maybe trying to stump him, selected the bat, “because it is a strange bird.” Jesus shaped clay into a bat, and breathed life into it. Finally, Jesus resurrected Shem, the son of Noah, who had been dead for four millennia. Shem, however, did “wish not for this miserable life,” and convinced Jesus to let him remain dead.<sup>49</sup>

Mirkhvand’s account takes terse details from the Qur’an, and fills them out, using the traditions of extrapolations found in other historians’ works and even Christian sources. Consider the elaborations on the Qur’an’s account of Mary’s pregnancy. As in 19:18, Mary modestly or fearfully warns the beautiful Gabriel to stay back “if you are pious.” Mirkhvand then explains that “some have asserted that in those days” Mary was speaking to a local womanizer named, with tongue in cheek, Pious. Then Mirkhvand gives two opinions on Jesus’s conception: Gabriel breathed on Mary, but “some say” on her sleeve, and some say into her womb. Mirkhvand includes an account of the reaction of Joseph, here Mary’s cousin. When she became pregnant, he courteously engaged her in a philosophical discussion, with a hidden agenda. Can a harvest come without a seed? Can a tree grow without water? Can a child be born without a father? Mary wisely explains that God could do or has done all these, as when he created the parentless Adam. Joseph then boldly asked after her pregnancy, which she confirmed was also from God.<sup>50</sup>

Mirkhvand expands on the few relevant Qur’anic verses to paint a human picture of the child John the Baptist, who upset his parents by cultivating a most unchildlike asceticism. John declined to play with neighbourhood kids (“We have not been created for play”), dressed like a monk, and ate so little that “his full moon became a crescent, and his body like a toothpick.” He wept frequently, and his father learned not to mention hell within earshot, lest it provoke panic and more penitence. Eventually, his parents stopped fighting him, and decided to let him “live as he likes,” as an ascetic. As adults, Jesus and John compared attitudes: Jesus said to John, “I see thee always with a distressed mind; perhaps thou has despaired of the mercy of God.” John retorted, “I see thee always smiling; perchance thou are sure of not incurring the displeasure of the Lord?” A later revelation made it known to both that Jesus’s optimism had been the correct attitude.<sup>51</sup>

Mirkhvand also offers a major elaboration of the Qur’an in his account of a particular miracle. In that revelation (5:112–15), the disciples asked for a table

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49 Mirkhvand, *The Rauzat-us-safa*, II, 165–69, 173–74.

50 Mirkhvand, *The Rauzat-us-safa*, II, 157–58.

51 Mirkhvand, *The Rauzat-us-safa*, II, 150–51.

of food to descend from heaven, as a sign of Jesus's legitimacy. Allah agreed, but warned that he would visit an innovative punishment on any who continued to doubt. Mirkhvand elaborates this four-verse account into three pages. He describes the spread of food precisely: a fish, "all kinds of vegetables except onion and leeks [...] five loaves of bread, on each of which there were a few olives, five pomegranates, and five dates." The disciples followed Jesus's lead in not eating anything, but crowds gathered to partake in the feast. Miraculously, sick eaters became healed, and the amount of food never diminished. At one point a revelation specified that the food was only for the poor, which prompted the rich to protest that injustice and raise doubts about the entire affair, thus triggering the threatened punishment: four hundred social elites were transformed into hogs, who went to weep repentantly before Jesus. Each nodded as Jesus acknowledged their human names, and after three days they died hideously.<sup>52</sup>

Although Mirkhvand offers his readers a unitary narrative, he frequently makes plain the points of irreconcilable divergence in his sources. The *Rauzat al-Safa'* as a whole synthesizes the work of dozens of previous histories. The Jesus passage, too, draws on multiple sources, mostly historians, but also the poet Hafiz (see Chapter 20) and at least one of the Christian gospels.<sup>53</sup> However, his list of disciples overlaps imperfectly with biblical information: Thaddaeus-Judas and Simon the Canaanite are missing; instead we find Fattrus, Nakhas, and Sarhus.<sup>54</sup> Mirkhvand includes other historians' variant assertions as to whether the disciples were fullers or dyers—indeed, dyers astonished when Jesus miraculously pulled clothes newly dyed in different colours from the same vat. He tells two stories with the same plot and twist: newly rich men murder each other out of their greed to be the sole possessor of the wealth. Some poison the others' food, who then slay the poisoners before eating and dying. After one telling, Jesus reflects, "it is thus that the world deals with those who are addicted to it." Mirkhvand authoritatively notes that Jesus lived thirty-three years on earth, or forty-two.<sup>55</sup> This is a presentation of Jesus's life that does not, perhaps could not, paper over the messiness of conflicting historical sources.

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52 Mirkhvand, *The Rauzat-us-safa*, II, 169–71.

53 Mirkhvand quotes Zechariah 13:7, predicts Simon Peter's triple betrayal, and mentions the crown of thorns. These three details are all found only in Matthew (26:31, 26:34, 27:29) and Mark (14:27, 14:30, 15:17).

54 Mirkhvand lists eleven disciples and Judas as the thirteenth in *The Rauzat-us-safa*, II, 178–79.

55 Mirkhvand, *The Rauzat-us-safa*, II, 162–64, 175–78.



### Toledot Jesus

The most unusual written Life of Jesus in this period was a Jewish text, the *Toledot Jesu*. Its origins are obscure. It probably took form early in the second millennium, but might encode a tradition going back still earlier; its defence of Mary's virginity and account of Jesus animating clay birds might have even influenced the Qur'an. Indeed, there were a number of parallels between it and the Islamic Jesus traditions, such as 'Abd al-Jabbar's (935–1025) treatment of Paul. It might even have been a direct parody of an apocryphal gospel no longer extant.<sup>56</sup>

The *Toledot* existed in a bewildering number of manuscript versions. In 1415, both Pope Benedict XIII (1328–1423) and King Ferdinand I of Aragon (1380–1416) condemned a Hebrew work, and copies of it were destroyed. The title in the papal-condemnation document is difficult to identify ("Mar mar Jesu"), but this could be the *Toledot* or a cousin of it. Francesc Eiximenis (d. 1409) condemned the *Toledot* in his ca. 1400 *Vida de Jesucrist* [Life of Jesus Christ].<sup>57</sup>

In the *Toledot*, the evil Joseph Pandera raped the pious Mary. She gave birth to a boy named "Yehoshua," whose name eventually shortened to "Yeshu," Jesus. The adolescent Yeshu disrespected Judaism: he went before the elders with his head uncovered, and argued that Moses was not the greatest prophet. The elders discovered the disreputable circumstances of his birth, and Yeshu fled to Galilee.

Later, Yeshu smuggled the Name of God out of the Jerusalem Temple by writing it on parchment which he placed inside a wound on his thigh. He then revealed his Messiahship, using Isaiah 7:14 ("Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son") and his own ability to work miracles—actually performed with the Name, and therefore constituting sorcery rather than "authentic" miracles.

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56 Morris Goldstein, *Jesus in the Jewish Tradition* (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International, 1984), 148–54; Samuel Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu nach jüdischen Quellen* (Berlin: S. Calvary, 1902), 2–7, 165–72, 194–200; Gabriel Said Reynolds, *A Muslim Theologian in the Sectarian Milieu: 'abd Al-Jabbār and the Critique of Christian Origins* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 90–91, 98–105; Hugh J. Schonfield, *According to the Hebrews: A New Translation of the Jewish Life of Jesus (the Toldoth Jesu), with an Inquiry Into the Nature of Its Sources and Special Relationship to the Lost Gospel According to the Hebrews* (London: Duckworth, 1937), 167–70. I base the version told in this chapter on Goldstein and on Krauss.

57 Yitzhak Baer, *Die Juden im christlichen Spanien*, 2 vols. (Berlin: Akademie-verlag, 1929), I, 828; Manuel Forcano i Aparicio, "Els antievangelis jueus: Les caricatures jueves de Jesús de Natzaret," *Enrahonar* 54 (2015): 11–31 (16); H. Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden*, 11 vols. (Leipzig: Ries'sche Buchdruckerei, 1864), VIII, 134–35. For the actual bull, see Julio Bartoloccio De Celleno, *Bibliotheca magna Rabbinica*, 3 vols. (Rome: Propaganda Fide, 1683), III, 734.

Yeshu accepted the elders' invitation to Jerusalem, which he entered on a donkey to fulfil Zechariah's (9:9) prophecy ("Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey..."), but they seized him and surrendered him to secular authority for execution as a sorcerer. The Jewish elders and Yeshu cited prophecy to argue against each other about his Messiahship, but it was his ability to raise the dead, using the Name, that convinced Queen Salome to release Yeshu. He continued to work miracles and gathered a larger public following.

To oppose him, the Jews recruited a man named Judas, and taught him the Name of God. Then, when Yeshu next appeared before the queen, and flew towards heaven, Judas was able to replicate the miracle. In the ensuing aerial struggle between the two men, both lost the ability to use the Name.

Yeshu was arrested, beaten with pomegranate staves, bound to a pillar, given vinegar to drink, and crowned with thorns, but some of his followers created a disturbance that allowed him to escape.

On the eve of the Passover, Yeshu returned to Jerusalem, again on a donkey, to re-acquire the Name. Judas informed the Jewish elders, who were able to seize Yeshu in the Temple when his followers betrayed his identity by bowing at him. The elders attempted to execute him by hanging him from a tree, but Yeshu had outsmarted them: he had previously used the Name to make himself immune to precisely that death. The elders found a loophole by hanging him from a carob stalk, which was more plant than tree. Yeshu died, and his body was buried outside Jerusalem.

On Sunday, his followers came to the queen to report that his grave was empty, which was quickly confirmed. His followers rejoiced that their master had ascended to heaven. Furious, the queen ordered that the body be presented to her within three days. Under such pressure, investigation revealed that a rabbi had stolen the body and re-buried it in a garden to prevent Yeshu's followers from themselves disappearing it to prove his ascension to heaven. The Jews dragged the body to the queen, who thus understood that Yeshu was not the Messiah.

This did not end the conflict among the Jews about his true identity. Therefore, the elders recruited Paul ("Simeon Kepha") to claim to be Yeshu's disciple, to use the Name to work miracles as proof, and to give the pro-Yeshu faction a new set of laws and customs. Thus, the Christian religion was created as a way of ending the dispute among the Jews. In some versions, the idea of "turning the other cheek" was included among the dozen or so characteristics of Christianity, most of which relate to diet or calendar.<sup>58</sup>

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58 Joseph Jacobs, Kaufmann Kohler, Richard Gottheil, and Samuel Krauss, "Jesus of Nazareth," in *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, 12 vols. (New York: Funk and Wangalls 1925), VII, 171-72.

The exact motivations of the author(s) of the *Toledot* are difficult to discern. Is this humour? Is this a defence of Judaism? The Castilian Bishop Alonso de Espina (ca. 1410–64), who might have been a converted Jew himself, considered (ca. 1464) the *Toledot* presentation of a sorcerer Jesus to be motivated by a strategy to release the Jews from any obligation to accept him as the Messiah. The Bishop thus took a plain-ken perspective to look at the human psychology of the authors, to explain a motive that for many Christian readers might appear as gratuitous blasphemy.<sup>59</sup>

### Envoi

The contents of these variant Lives are extraordinary. In some, Jews were further villainized, Jesus elevated, and an execution becomes an act of a notary public. In others, the Jews became the protagonists battling an evil, deceitful Jesus. These elaborations and elisions of the canonical material reveal the priorities and values of the societies that first created and then repeatedly repeated them. They also show a range of approaches, from the poetic and deep-ken recognition that those who choose not to see were literally blind, to the fifteenth-century discovery or manufacture of a first-century Jewish text speaking directly to an imagined audience that thought with the plain ken.

This chapter concludes by zooming in on a single detail. The fraudulent Jesus of the *Toledot Jesu* proved his Messiahship by faking miracles through the use of the Name of God. When the Jews recruited Judas to defeat him, they armed their champion by teaching him the Name of God. In Jewish tradition, the name of God had long held a special status. This was one example of a traditional attitude towards names, and towards words in general, an attitude largely fallen from the modern mind, except for special cases like the “n-word” which must not be written out (see Chapter 17).

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59 Alonso Espina,  *Fortalitium fidei* (Lyons: Guillaume Balsarin, 1487), book 3. See Robert Chazan, *Daggers of Faith: Thirteenth-Century Christian Missionizing and Jewish Response* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989), 38–48.

# SPACES



## 5. Jesus Places

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Churches and mosques have different statuses and serve different functions, but some structures—especially those on the shifting borders between the two principal subcults—have been both. Palermo Cathedral, for example, was a church converted into a mosque converted into a church. Jesus was central to many of these transitions. A mosque in Valencia was converted into a church, and a window near its *mihrab*, the niche pointed towards Mecca, was covered and adorned with Jesus images “so that by them all impurity may be purged and abolished.”<sup>1</sup> The most famous example is the patriarchal cathedral Hagia Sophia, in the Roman imperial capital of Constantinople. When the Ottomans conquered the city, Mehmed II (1432–81) marched to the cathedral, humbly sprinkled dirt on his turban, placed the priests under his protection, and had the *shahada* declared from the pulpit: there was no God but God, and by implication Jesus became exclusively human.<sup>2</sup> In the eleventh century, Christians conquered the Muslim principality of Toledo in Iberia. As the triumphant invaders approached a mosque, the king’s horse abruptly knelt at its front gate, and refused to budge. Investigation revealed that the horse had not become a Muslim, but instead had sensed a wall niche hiding a small Jesus image and a lit lamp. Apparently when the Muslims had conquered Toledo over three centuries earlier, they had respectfully sealed up the niche, and the lamp had miraculously burned through the centuries until the Christians reconquered and rediscovered it. Possibly this mosque had previously been a church, in which case the pious, sensitive horse triggered the building’s re-conversion.<sup>3</sup>

Many religious sites were named after some aspect of Jesus’s life, or after someone named after him (see Chapter 17). In this chapter, a more systematic

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- 1 Mark D. Myerson, *The Muslims of Valencia in the Age of Fernando and Isabel* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991), 45, <https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520334953>
  - 2 Steven Runciman, *The Fall of Constantinople, 1453* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1965), 149.
  - 3 Julio Porres de Mateo, “Algunas Leyendas Toledanas y su base histórica,” *Anales Toledanos* 19 (1984): 136–40. The “Christo de la luz” name is seventeenth-century, but it was known as “ermita de la cruz” in our period.

exploration is undertaken of places with Jesus connections beyond the nominal. The Jesus cult made itself most at home in two kinds of buildings, mosques and churches; their construction and use drew from both kens. Some Jesus buildings marked events in his life, from birth to burial. We will watch Far Western Christians create carefully measured replicas of these buildings, and Muslims inscribe Jesus references into the walls of their shrines. The chapter ends in Florence, with an unusually direct relationship with Jesus—naming him its king in 1495.

## Architecture and the Two Kens

Some churches and mosques were prominent for their vast size. We give the prefix “mega-” to those structures with footprints reaching around 8,000 m<sup>2</sup>, the size of two football fields. In 1400, the Christian subcult already had a number of previously built megachurches, including the Hagia Sophia and the mostly thirteenth-century cathedrals at Amiens, York, Cologne, and Antwerp. The Muslim subcult’s major megamosques included those in Mecca, Medina, Cairo, and Damascus. In 1400, a wave of new megachurches emerges, either under construction or recently completed, including those at Florence, Ulm, Rome (St. Paul’s Outside the Walls), and Bologna, with Milan and Seville dwarfing them all. In the 1440s, the Dughlat emir of Kashgar, to the west of China, built the vast Id Kah Mosque.

Megamosques had large footprints, and the megachurches soared. Both were huge projects, and construction proceeded slowly. The roof of the Liebfrauenmünster in Ingolstadt consumed 3800 trees.<sup>4</sup> Construction of the nave of Canterbury Cathedral was put on hold for a decade after rebel peasants beheaded its archbishop in 1381. Debated design details delayed the Milan Cathedral.<sup>5</sup> Its construction had begun in 1386, and was half completed in 1402, but a lack of agreement and a lack of money stopped work in 1480.<sup>6</sup>

Churches were designed according to deep-ken logic. The thirteenth-century Troyes Cathedral’s choir’s keystones, decorated with a Jesus image, reached 88 ft 8 in above the ground. “Jesus” in Greek, Ἰησοῦς, corresponded to 888 in the

4 Barbara Schock-Werner, “Bauhütten und Baubetrieb der Spätgotik,” in *Die Parler und der schöne Stil 1350–1400*, ed. Anton Legner, 3 vols. (Cologne: Schnütgen-Museum, 1978), III, 55–65 (58).

5 Robert Odell Bork, *The Geometry of Creation: Architectural Drawing and the Dynamics of Gothic Design* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 412.

6 Ernesto Brivio, *The Duomo: Art, Faith, History of the Cathedral of Milan* (Milan: Veneranda Fabbrica del Duomo di Milano, 2003); Arturo Faccioli, *Milan Cathedral: A Historical and Illustrated Guide* (Milan: Veneranda Fabbrica del Duomo, 1954).

gematria numerology system: I (10) + H (8) + C (200) + O (70) + V (400) + C (200).<sup>7</sup> Churches were often constructed in the cruciform shape of Latin or Greek crosses,<sup>8</sup> had burial grounds (with Jesus-related markers like crosses), and were literally “oriented”—set out with their altars towards the east, the Orient. Thomas Aquinas (1225–74) recorded some of the explanations, which cited Old Testament prophecies usually linked to Jesus, or the expectation that Jesus would return from the eastern direction (Mt 24:27).<sup>9</sup>

This trend in church orientation was widespread, but with many local variations, including the opposite (“occidentation”) at Rome. Difficulties of a particular local topography might make orientation not worth the trouble. The precise direction identified as east also varied, as the sunrise drifted northward and southward during the course of the year. Some churches oriented themselves to sunrise on the feast day of their patron saint, but many relied on the Easter sunrise. This introduced a further variable, as Easter itself moved through the solar calendar. Some churches navigated these variable cycles by anchoring their orientation towards the sunrise on the day which had been Easter during the years of their foundation.<sup>10</sup>

In contrast, mosques were oriented, usually with greater sophistication, towards Mecca, the direction known as the *qibla*. At the invitation of Ulugh Beg (1394–1449), a grandson of Timur, the mathematician al-Kashi (ca. 1380–1429) arrived in Samarkand and successfully designed a hole in the wall of a *mihrab*, the prayer niche marking the *qibla*, such that the sun shone through it during, and only during, afternoon prayer.<sup>11</sup> In practice, the method for determining the *qibla*, and the results of those processes, could vary. Some were oriented due south, essentially treating the mosque location as if it were Medina, to the north of Mecca. Other mosques’ *qiblas* were located by the rising or setting of the sun or some bright star, by the direction of the dominant winds, or by the immediate direction of the local road that ultimately led to Mecca. Less common were

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7 Jean Hani, *The Symbolism of the Christian Temple*, trans. Robert Proctor (Kettering: Angelico Press, 2016), 29–30; Charles-Jean Ledit, *Une cathédrale au nombre d’or* (Troyes: Tetraktys, 1960).

8 In Georgia, churches tend to have hidden apses, so the external form does not appear cruciform. See Ori Z. Soltes, *National Treasures of Georgia* (London: Philip Wilson, 1999), 101.

9 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II, q. 84, art. 3.

10 Patrick Arneitz, Andrea Draxler, Roman Rauch, and Roman Leonhardt, “Orientation of Churches by Magnetic Compasses?” *Geophysical Journal International* 198 (2014): 1–7, <https://doi.org/10.1093/gji/ggu107>; Peter Cunich and Jason R. Ali, “The Orientation of Churches: Some New Evidence,” *The Antiquaries Journal* 81 (2001): 155–193, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0003581500072188>

11 Mohammad Bagheri, “A Newly Found Letter of al-Kāshī on Scientific Life in Samarkand,” *Historia Mathematica* 24 (1997): 241–56 (244).



complex calculations using projective geometry or spherical trigonometry. While churches consonated with the eastern direction (deep ken), mosques envisioned a homogeneous world of longitude and latitude (plain ken) to approximate the *qibla*. The *qibla*-finding method of the eleventh-century astronomer al-Biruni (973–ca. 1050) involved determining multiple approximations of his longitude and taking their average. One fifteenth-century manuscript from Samarkand listed accurate and precise *qibla* values for 274 locations. Where the Christian orientation speculations were confident and vague, the Muslim ones were complex and precise.<sup>12</sup>

As an example of time and space coming together in a Jesus place, consider the Reims Cathedral, where Guillaume de Machaut's (ca. 1300–77) compositions (see Chapter 18) resonated: 138.75 m (about 455 ft) in length, 30 m (about 98 ft) in width at the nave, and 38 m (about 125 ft) maximum height. The next page has a pop-up diagram of the Reims Cathedral, which you are invited to print/cut out (see Fig. 5.1). Folding up the southern walls of the church—on the right side of the page—creates a three-dimensional model. A Christian cathedral was a complex space designed to coordinate the mass and the liturgical offices with the hour of the day and the day of the year, two temporal cycles. For each ceremony, the sun was at a unique point in the sky, not to return to that point until a year later. The apparent position of the sun, relative to the perspective of a priest standing at the altar, on Easter 1400, is marked on the diagram.<sup>13</sup>

Deep-ken features were not unusual in Late Traditional architecture. In Prague, Charles IV (1316–78) empowered a new bridge by having its construction begin in 1357, on 9 July at 5:31. Date and time arranged thus created a symmetrical bridge of odd numbers ascending (1, 3, 5, 7) to 9 and then descending in reverse order from 7 (July's number) down through 5 and 3 to 1. This time also saw the sun in conjunction with Saturn, thus dispelling the latter's impact, and the bridge was located to line up the summer solstice with a key tomb in the cathedral. Wooden crucifixes were installed on top of the Charles Bridge, but, not enjoying the same deep-ken protection, did not survive the fifteenth century.<sup>14</sup>

12 David A. King, "Astronomy and Islamic Society: Qibla, Gnomonics and Timekeeping," in *Encyclopedia of the History of Arabic Science*, ed. Roshdi Rashed, 3 vols. (London: Routledge, 1996), I, 128–56; David A. King, "The Sacred Geography of Islam," in *Mathematics and the Divine: A Historical Study*, ed. Teun Koetsier and Luc Bergmans (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2004), 161–78 (171).

13 The spirit of this diagram is echoed by the underlying rationalism of the contemporary cross-section illustration of the Milan Cathedral in Cesare Cesariano, *Di Lucio Vitruvio Pollione de architectura libri dece* (Como: Gotardus de Ponte, 1521), fol. 15v.

14 Zdeněk Horský, "Založení Karlova mostu a kosmologická symbolika Staroměstské mostecké věže," in *Staletá Praha*, ed. Z. Buřival, 9 vols. (Prague: Panorama, 1979), IX, 202–03.

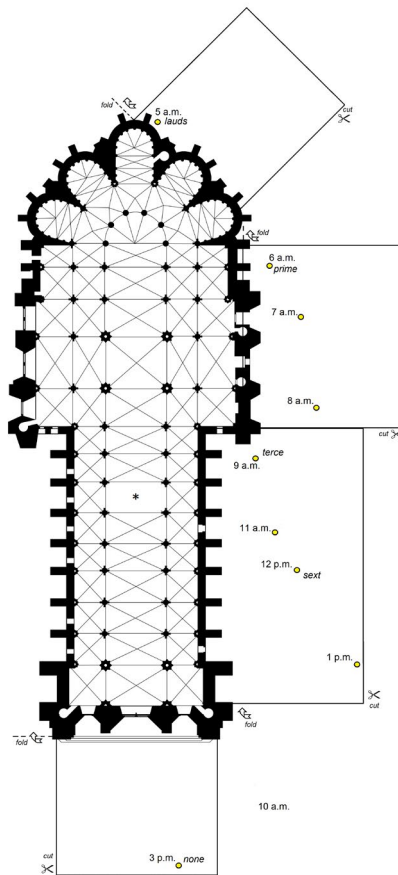


Fig. 5.1 Reims Cathedral, Eugène Viollet-le-Duc (1814–79), *Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture française du XIe au XVIe siècle* (1856). Wikimedia, public domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Plan.cathedrale.Reims.png>. Annotations by Luke Clossey (2023), CC BY-NC.

## Connections to Life Events

All churches have an immediate link to Jesus because the mass, in which Jesus's body and blood were created, was typically celebrated in a church (see Chapter 9). Some churches and mosques consonated with Jesus also because they stood at, and facilitated pious remembrance of, a key moment in the course of his earthly life, past or future. These structures formed a kind of architectural life of Jesus. A pilgrim might visit some or all of them, and access the power resonating behind and among them. The temporal specifics of the contemporary Holy Land became increasingly interesting to visitors. Three times as many pilgrims wrote

accounts of Holy Land travels in 1480–90 than in any previous decade.<sup>15</sup> The Dutch pilgrim Erhard Reuwich (ca. 1445–1505) used his first-hand experience of Jerusalem to illustrate Bernhard von Breydenbach’s account of his own 1483–84 pilgrimage. In addition to featuring the first-ever printed extensive map of the Holy Land and detailed architectural imagery, the Breydenbach-Reuwich guide includes visual and textual information about contemporary local dress and the Arabic language (see Fig. 5.2). Possibly the first illustrated travel guide made in the Far West, it featured Arabic script and a map of Palestine made from personal observation. Such guides spoke to a temporal concern with knowledge about a particular space, although often without any sense of that place changing as time passed.<sup>16</sup>

A place might even be linked to a event to come, in the future life of Jesus. Damascus’s Great Umayyad Mosque—built in the eighth century on what had been the Church of St. John the Baptist, which had in turn been built on a temple to Jupiter—had two minarets, the Minaret of the Bride and the more recent (thirteenth-century) Minaret of Jesus, “of Isa,” also called “white” or eastern. This minaret derived its name from its deep-ken consonance with an earlier hadith that said Jesus would come from heaven and alight here, while wearing clothing dyed with saffron and “placing his hands on the wings of two Angels.”<sup>17</sup>

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- 15 Pierre Barbatre (1480), Santo Brasca (1480), anonymous pilgrim from Paris (1480), Felix Fabri (1482), Paul Walther (1482), Bernhard von Breydenbach (1483), Francesco Suriano (1483), Conrad Grünenberg (1486), anonymous pilgrim from Rennes (1486), Girolamo da Castiglione (1486), Georges Lengherand (1486), Nicolas Le Huen (1487), Jehan de Cucharmoy (1490), Philippe de Voisins (1490). Relatively few pilgrims wrote travelogues, and fewer of those survive; the 1480s peak may not reflect an increase in the total number of pilgrims. See Nicole Chareyron, *Pilgrims to Jerusalem in the Middle Ages*, trans. W. Donald Wilson (New York: Columbia UP, 2005), <https://doi.org/10.7312/char13230>; Jesse Hysell, “By Means of Secret Help and Gifts’: Venetians, Mamluks, and Pilgrimage to the Holy Land at the Turn of the Sixteenth Century,” *Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 49 (2018): 277–96, <https://doi.org/10.1484/J.VIATOR.5.119582>
- 16 Michele Campopiano, *Writing the Holy Land: The Franciscans of Mount Zion and the Construction of a Cultural Memory, 1300–1550* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-52774-7>
- 17 *Sahīh Muslim*, ed. Abul Hussain Muslim Ibn al-Hajjaj, trans. Nasiruddin al-Khattab, 7 vols. (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2007), VII, 335 [7373] 110–(2937). Other traditions located Jesus’s touch-down point at Damascus’s walls or at the Great Mosque of Mecca. See Muhammad b. Khavandshah Mirkhvand, *The Rauzat-us-safa, or Garden of Purity*, trans. E. Rehatsek, ed. F. F. Arbuthnot, 3 vols. (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1892), II, 182.



Fig. 5.2 Erhard Reuwich, *Map of Jerusalem*, in Bernhard von Breydenbach, *Peregrinatio in Terram Sanctam* (Cologne: Peter Schoffer, 1486). Wikimedia, public domain, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Peregrinatio\\_in\\_terrām\\_sanctam\\_Jerusalem\\_map\\_in\\_color.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Peregrinatio_in_terrām_sanctam_Jerusalem_map_in_color.jpg)

## Infancy in Bethlehem and Egypt

The Church of the Nativity, above the grotto where Mary had nursed Baby Jesus, was in great disrepair in 1400 (see Fig. 5.3). In the fifteenth century, lead, wood, and artisans were sent from England and Venice to repair the roof.<sup>18</sup> In one poem, Oswald von Wolkenstein (1376/77–1445) testified that he had himself seen the cleft that the devil, furious at the Nativity, tore into the wall of the cave.<sup>19</sup> The church was still actively used by a variety of visitors. At the Milk Grotto, where the nursing Mary had let her milk drop upon a stone, pilgrims came to collect a milky substance, white with a hint of red, for healing or blessing. If you removed some milk, an identical quantity would ooze out anew, so there was a constant amount present.<sup>20</sup> New mothers unable to lactate would drink smoothies made from the soil from this church, after which their

18 William Harvey, *Structural Survey of the Church of the Nativity, Bethlehem* (London: Oxford UP, 1935), xiii.

19 Oswald von Wolkenstein, *The Poems of Oswald von Wolkenstein*, trans. Albrecht Classen (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 110.

20 Ludolph von Suchem, *Description of the Holy Land*, trans. Aubrey Stewart (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2013), 95–96; Grethenios, “Pèlerinage de l’archimandrite Grethenios (vers 1400),” in *Itinéraires russes en Orient*, trans. B. de Khitrow (Geneva: Fick, 1889), 182.

breasts would spurt milk “like two little fountains.”<sup>21</sup> Muslim women living near the church would bake bread, for wide distribution, as its consumption allowed for painless childbirth. Ailing women from both subcults took advantage of these means.<sup>22</sup>

An old tradition located the Cradle of Jesus (Mahd Isa) in Jerusalem. A room associated with the cradle existed in the Stables of Solomon (al-Marwani Mosque) beneath the ground level in the southeast corner of the Temple Mount complex. This was an important site, especially for Muslims. In the 1390s, the pilgrim Ibn al-Sabbah al-Andalusi was in the Holy Land and made a map of the Temple Mount, including Cradle of Jesus.<sup>23</sup> The cradle itself was, and is, a large cavity cut from a marble block laid down on the floor. Its head abutted a wall to line up underneath a carved, fluted alcove. An eleventh-century Muslim, Nasir Khusraw, described the cradle (1.8 x 1.2 x 0.8 m) as “large enough for men to pray in.” He noted a tradition that Jesus had been born here—unlike the gospels, the Qur’an did not link the Nativity with Bethlehem—and mentioned a nearby column with gouges left by the fingers of Mary clutched during labour.<sup>24</sup> A Christian twelfth-century report mentioned the devotion shown here, as well as to a wooden crib venerated because Jesus had used it.<sup>25</sup> Other traditions linked the cradle to the Massacre of the Innocents, when the newborn Jesus was hidden there, or to the Presentation of the forty-day-old Jesus at the Temple.<sup>26</sup>

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- 21 Francesco Suriano, *Il trattato di terra santa e dell'oriente di Frate Francesco Suriano*, ed. Girolamo Golubovich (Milan: Tipografia Editrice Artigianelli, 1900), 124.
  - 22 Muḥammad Ibn-ʿAbdallāh Ibn-Baṭṭūta, *The Travels of Ibn Battuta, A.D. 1325–1354*, trans. H. A. R. Gibb, 4 vols. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP), I, 77. In the late sixteenth century, the Church of the Nativity was still being used by Muslims; see William Frederick Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam under the Sultans*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929), II, 682.
  - 23 Ibn al-Sabbah al-Andalusi, *Nisbat al-akhbar wa tadkirat al-akhbar*, ed. Jum’a Shikha (Tunis: al-Matba’a al-Magharibiyya, 2011), 269; Antonio Constán-Nava, “Edición diplomática, traducción y estudio de la obra Niṣāb al-ajbār wa-taḍkirat al-ajyār de Ibn al-Ṣabbāḥ (s. IX H./XV e.C.)” (PhD thesis, University of Alicante, 2014), 709. See Nabil Matar, “The Cradle of Jesus and the Oratory of Mary in Jerusalem’s al-Haram al-Sharif,” *Jerusalem Quarterly* 70 (2017): 111–25 (118).
  - 24 Nasir Khusraw, *Nāṣer-e Khosraw’s Book of Travels (Safarnāma)*, trans. W. M. Thackston, Jr. (Albany, NY: Persian Heritage, 1986), 26.
  - 25 John of Würzburg, “Descriptio Terrae Sanctae,” in *Descriptiones Terrae Sanctae ex saeculo VIII., IX., XII. Et XV.* ed. Titus Tobler (Leipzig: Hinrichs’sche, 1874), 129–31.
  - 26 Andreas Kaplony, “Die fatimidische ‘Moschee der Wiege Jesu’ in Jerusalem,” *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins* 113 (1997): 123–32; David Myres, “Restorations on Masjid Mahd ʿIsa (The Cradle of Jesus) during the Ottoman Period,” in *Ottoman Jerusalem, The Living City: 1517–1917*, ed. Sylvia Auld and Robert Hillenbrand (London: Al Tajir World of Islam Trust, 2000), 525–37; Denys Pringle, *The Churches of the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem*, 4 vols. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2007), III, 310–14.

In the fourteenth century, Muslims congregated here to recite Qur'an 19, the surah named after Mary.<sup>27</sup> The *qadi* Mujir al-Din al-Hanbali (1456–1522) wrote a history of Jerusalem that noted the continuation of this practice, which at that time had been supplemented by readings of the account at Qur'an 38 of Jesus's Ascension into heaven.<sup>28</sup>



Fig. 5.3 Konrad von Grunenburg, *Von Konstanz nach Jerusalem eine Pilgerfahrt zum Heiligen Grab im Jahre 1486* (Konstanz: n.p., 1487), 47. Wikimedia, public domain, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Konrad\\_von\\_Gr%C3%BCnberg\\_-\\_Beschreibung\\_der\\_Reise\\_von\\_Konstanz\\_nach\\_Jerusalem\\_-\\_Blatt\\_47r\\_-\\_099.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Konrad_von_Gr%C3%BCnberg_-_Beschreibung_der_Reise_von_Konstanz_nach_Jerusalem_-_Blatt_47r_-_099.jpg)

Further south, the journey of Jesus and his family into Egypt allowed for pilgrimage sites to be identified there, and then be confirmed by subsequent miracles. The Saints Sergius and Bacchus Church, in Cairo, was built over a cave where the Holy Family first stayed upon arrival in Egypt. A church in El Matareya, now a northern district of Cairo, marked the location of Mary stopping to wash Jesus, and had a sycamore tree with healing properties. The Latin word

27 Ibn-Baṭṭūṭa, *The Travels of Ibn Battuta*, 74; Myres, "Restorations," 526.

28 Moudjir ed-Dyn, *Histoire de Jérusalem et d'Hébron depuis Abraham jusqu'à la fin du Xve siècle de Jesu Christ*, trans. Henry Sauvaire (Paris: Leroux, 1876), 103.

for mother, *mater*, gave its name to the district because of this connection with Mary and Jesus.<sup>29</sup>

## Death and Ascension in Jerusalem

Jerusalem contained a number of sites linked to events in Jesus's Passion. In the gospels, Judas attempted to return to the Jewish authorities the thirty pieces of silver they had given him for betraying Jesus. They refused to accept back this "blood money," and instead donated it for the purchase of land just south of Jerusalem for the burial of foreigners, known as Akeldama, the "field of blood" (Mt 27:7–8). It became a pilgrimage destination in its own right, and, with deepened appropriateness, became a burial site for foreigners who died while visiting the city. The soil there acquired a reputation as an effective solvent and as a deodorant for any corpses buried in it. European pilgrims took samples home with them, as useful holy souvenirs, in particular for application in cemeteries. Even in the Far West, the soil's qualities were reserved for foreigners, however, and Akeldama earth would regurgitate locals buried in it.<sup>30</sup>

The Church of the Holy Sepulchre<sup>31</sup> sits at the site of the Crucifixion and Jesus's tomb, and had long been a focus of Christian devotion before our period. Henry IV (ca. 1367–1413) of England had visited the tomb personally, and later, prompted by rumours that Ethiopia was poised to take Jerusalem, sent (ca. 1400) a report of his devotion and that trip to the Ethiopian emperor.<sup>32</sup> Around the same time wooden carved replicas of the Holy Sepulchre became popular in Novgorod.<sup>33</sup>

The historian Abu Shama of Damascus (1203–68) punned on "Holy Sepulchre," changing the church's name from القيامة *al-qiyamah* to القمامة

29 Otto Meinardus, "The Itinerary of the Holy Family," *Studia Orientalia Christiana* 7 (1962): 344.

30 Felix Fabri, *The Wanderings of Felix Fabri*, trans. Aubrey Stewart, 2 vols. (London: Palestine Pilgrims' Text Society, 1892), I, 534–38. Bianca Kühnel, Renana Bartal, and Neta Bodner, "Natural Materials, Place, and Representation," in *Natural Materials of the Holy Land and the Visual Translation of Place, 500–1500*, ed. Bianca Kühnel, Renana Bartal, and Neta Bodner (London: Routledge, 2017), xxiii–xxxiv (xxiii).

31 Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance* (New York: Zone, 2010), 168–69, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1453n0p>

32 F. C. Hingeston, ed., *Royal and Historical Letters during the Reign of Henry IV*, 2 vols. (London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1860) I, 421–22.

33 O. B. Strugova, "Russian Wooden Icons and Religious Sculpture," in *The Sacred Art of Russia from Ivan the Terrible to Peter the Great*, ed. Paula Marlais Hancock, Carolyn S. Vigtel, and Margaret Wallace (Atlanta, GA: Georgia International Cultural Exchange, 1995), 30–34 (31).

*al-qumamah*.<sup>34</sup> The shared q-m-m consonant cluster of *qiyamah* and *qumamah* generates a variety of meanings, including resurrection, union, or garbage.<sup>35</sup> Thus this could mean either Church of Resurrection, Church of Union, or Church of the Garbage. The etymological possibilities gave rise to a legend, one version preserved by Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406): having travelled to Jerusalem to recover the cross, the Empress Helena discovered that it had been torn down and covered with garbage. To mark the location, she had built the Church of the Filth; to get revenge on the Jews, she had garbage dumped on the Dome of the Rock's Foundation Stone.<sup>36</sup>

Jerusalem also preserved footprints of Jesus, presumably at the moment of his Ascension into heaven. One foot's print was in the Chapel of the Ascension, on the Mount of Olives, and the other in the al-Aqsa Mosque, on Temple Mount. The latter was just south of the Dome of the Rock, which had the footprint of Muhammad imprinted before he ascended while on his own celestial Night Journey. Presumably because of the proximity of the other footprints, Muhammad's had sometimes been identified as Jesus's.<sup>37</sup>

## Replicating Jesus Places

Other churches around Christendom were built to resonate with the Holy Sepulchre. The twelfth-century Round Church in Cambridge was built by the Fraternity of the Holy Sepulchre. The knight and mayor Georg Emmerich (fifteenth century) had built a Holy Sepulchre, ca. 1500, in Görlitz, in eastern Saxony.<sup>38</sup> In Bruges, one Pieter II Adornes (ca. 1395–1464) established a Jerusalem chapel (1429) to consonate with the Holy Sepulchre. His son Anselm, after a pilgrimage, on foot, to Jerusalem, returned (1471) and renovated the

34 Abu Shama, *Livre des deux jardins* *منتخبات من كتاب الروضتين في أخبار الدولتين النورية والصلاحية*, in *Recueil des historiens des croisades*, ed. and trans. A.C. Barbier de Meynard, 4 vols. (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1898), IV, 321.

35 Zakaria Mohammad, "The Holy Sepulchre and the Garbage Dump: An Etymology," trans. By Salim Tamari, *Jerusalem Quarterly* 50 (2012): 108–12.

36 Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, trans. Franz Rosenthal, 3 vols. (New York: Pantheon, 1958), II, 262 (ch. 4, sec. 6).

37 Antoninus of Piacenza, *De locis sanctis quae perambulavit Antoninus martyr circa A.D. 570*, ed. Titus Tobler (St. Gallen: Huber, 1863), 26; Paul Geyer, ed., *Itinera hierosolymitana saeculi IIII–VIII* (Prague: Tempsky, 1898), 107–08; Perween Hasan, "The Footprint of the Prophet," *Muqarnas* 10 (1993): 335–43; Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam*, 186, 195; John Wilkinson, ed., *Jerusalem Pilgrimage, 1099–1185* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1988), 105, 177–80.

38 Adolf Wrede, *Ernst der Bekenner, Herzog von Braunschweig und Lüneburg* (Halle: Verein für Reformationsgeschichte, 1888), 80–82.



chapel based on his experience in that city. A copper ball topped its tower, and echoed the look of oriental domes. In the chapel itself, a sculptured rock and a painted mural lent themselves to a visual recreation of Calvary.<sup>39</sup> The pilgrimage of Oxford theologian William Wey (1407–76) spurred the creation of a chapel at Edington that had the “likeness” of the Holy Sepulchre. That chapel housed a seven-foot-long guide map, and a reliquary with stones collected from various Holy Land sites.<sup>40</sup>

The churches were designed with the plain ken to be as accurate to the Holy Sepulchre as possible, which, in turn, established a deep-ken consonance. The goal was not to build the best tomb, but the one that consonated most optimally with Jesus’s own tomb. In fact, the “best” tomb could even be undesirable—a German bishop in the 1360s became dismayed upon realizing that the tomb designed for him was superior to Jesus’s: “it should not be, that my grave is finer than God’s.”<sup>41</sup> Now the ideal tomb was not the most lavish, but the most precise replica of the Holy Sepulchre. Pilgrims had taken measurements for centuries,<sup>42</sup> but the practice increased in the fifteenth century. The cloister walls of Bebenhausen Abbey, outside Tübingen, had lines, made in 1492, that marked off the length of the Holy Sepulchre.<sup>43</sup> In Florence, the wealthy merchant Giovanni di Paolo Rucellai (1403–81) commissioned Leon Battista Alberti (1404–72) to engineer a Holy Sepulchre replica (1467)

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39 Nadine Mai, “Place and Surface: Golgotha in Late Medieval Bruges,” in *Natural Materials of the Holy Land and the Visual Translation of Place, 500–1500*, ed. Bianca Kühnel, Renana Bartal, and Neta Bodner (London: Routledge, 2017), 190–206, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315210315-11>

40 Kathryn Blair Moore, *The Architecture of the Christian Holy Land: Reception from Late Antiquity through the Renaissance* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2017), 183–210, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316488362>; Kathryn M. Rudy, “A Guide to Mental Pilgrimage: Paris, Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal Ms. 212,” *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 63 (2000): 494–515; Zur Shalev, “Christian Pilgrimage and Ritual Measurement in Jerusalem,” *Micrologus* 19 (2011): 131–50. See Francis Davey, ed. and trans., *The Itineraries of William Wey* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010).

41 Colin Morris, *The Sepulchre of Christ and the Medieval West: From the Beginning to 1600* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005) 357, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198269281.001.0001>

42 Moore, *Architecture of the Christian Holy Land*, 26–28.

43 Werner Heinz, “Heilige Längen: Zu den Maßen des Christus- und des Mariengrabes in Bebenhausen,” *Mediaevistik* 28 (2015): 297–324.

for use as his own tomb.<sup>44</sup> Pieter Sterckx came to Leuven from Jerusalem, with measurements, in 1505.<sup>45</sup>

Attention on the Sepulchre was part of a broader plain-ken interest in Jerusalem's metrics, which pre-dated, but peaked in, our period. Pseudo-Bonaventure (see Chapter 4) relied on pilgrims' reports of distances between Holy Land locations, and would compare distances in contemporary Italy to distances from Jerusalem.<sup>46</sup> Johannes Poloner in 1433 counted, "with all the diligence that he could," the steps between the Stations of the Cross, a series of locations linked to the last moments of Jesus before his death.<sup>47</sup> Similarly, Martin Ketzler made a pilgrimage in 1468 to recover measurements of the distance between stations. His losing the numbers on his return necessitated a second trip.<sup>48</sup> A 1467 Dutch will calling for the recreation of the Holy Land in Leiden specified that even the number of steps to the top of Calvary be the same (eighteen), and that the Bethlehem crib be duplicated "as near as one can achieve."<sup>49</sup> Archbishop John II of Baden (1434–1503) used measurements

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- 44 Quoted in Girolamo Mancini, *Vita di Leon Battista Alberti* (Florence: Sansoni, 1882), 465–66. See Ludwig H. Heydenreich, "Die Cappella Rucellai von San Pancrazio in Florenz," in *Essays in Honor of Erwin Panofsky*, ed. Millard Meiss, *De artibus opuscula* 40, 2 vols. (New York: New York UP, 1961) I, 225; Bram de Klerck, "Jerusalem in Renaissance Italy: The Holy Sepulchre on the Sacro Monte of Varallo," in *The Imagined and Real Jerusalem in Art and Architecture*, ed. Jeroen Goudeau, Mariëtte Verhoeven, and Wouter Weijers (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 227–30, fig. 9.8, [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004270855\\_011](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004270855_011); Gastone Petrini, "La cappella del Santo Sepolcro nella ex-chiesa di S. Pancrazio in Firenze," in *Toscana e Terrasanta nel Medioevo*, ed. Franco Cardini (Florence: Alinea, 1982), 339–42.
- 45 Maria Meertens, *De godsvrucht in de Nederlanden naar handschriften van gebedenboeken der XV<sup>e</sup> eeuw*, 4 vols. (Antwerp: Standaard, 1931), II, 104.
- 46 Iohannis de Caulibus, *Meditaciones vite Christi olim S. Bonaventuro attributae* (Brepols: Turnhout, 1997), 88, 269.
- 47 Johannes Poloner, "Descriptio Terrae Sanctae" [1421], in *Descriptiones Terrae Sanctae ex saeculo VIII. IX. XII. Et XV.*, ed. Titus Tobler (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1874), 229. See Susanna Fischer, "Das Heilige Land im Gitternetz: die Strukturierung von Raum und Zeit in der 'Descriptio terrae sanctae' des Johannes Poloner," *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 93 (2019): 393–402, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41245-019-00092-0>
- 48 Reproduced at Franz Trautmann, *Die Abenteuer Herzog Christophs von Bayern*, 2 vols. (Regensburg: Pustet, 1880), II, 441–42. Doubts have been raised about this letter, which was lost in the nineteenth century. See H. Michaelson, "Adam Krafft's sieben Stationen," *Repertorium für Kunstwissenschaft* 22 (1899): 395–96 and Susanne Wegmann, "Der Kreuzweg von Adam Kraft in Nürnberg: Ein Abbild Jerusalems in der Heimat," *Mitteilungen des Vereins für Geschichte der Stadt Nürnberg* 84 (1997): 94–95.
- 49 Will of Wouter Ijsbrantszoon (1467), reproduced at D. E. H. De Boer, "Jherusalem in Leyden of de strijd om een erfenis," *De Leidse Hofjes* 8 (1979): 39–75 (52).

from returning pilgrims to create in Trier a path of a length equidistant to that between Pilate's house and the Crucifixion site.<sup>50</sup>

At the end of the century, this enthusiasm for replication extended beyond the Sepulchre to include other Jerusalem sites. In Italy, "sacred mountains" (*sacri monti*) were multiple chapels each linked to one or more events in Jesus's biography, especially the Passion. The first was built at Varallo Sesia, in Piedmont, in 1486, followed by one at San Vivaldo, Tuscany, 1500–16. The designs of these sacred mountains at times took a deep-ken interest in consonating with Jerusalem, and at times a plain-ken interest in reproducing its spatial layout, or the experience of pilgrims there. Local hills could correspond to Jerusalem hills, such as Calvary and the Mount of Olives. Varallo's design ignored fifteenth-century Jerusalem, to better evoke first-century Jerusalem for the plain ken. Around 1490, Varallo had installed a part of the stone of the Holy Sepulchre and another stone slab that was "in every way like" (*in tutto simile*) the ones covering the Holy Sepulchre. One Varallo pilgrimage booklet uses *assomigliato* to describe the resemblance,<sup>51</sup> and its sepulchre entrance was inscribed with an assertion of that resemblance.<sup>52</sup> Resembling Holy Land topography, San Vivaldo had such correspondence that the map of Jerusalem, rotated ninety degrees, could be superimposed meaningfully. In Jerusalem, pilgrims went first to the Holy Sepulchre, then the next day to Calvary, the House of Pilate, and finally the Mount of Olives. In Europe, a sacred mountain's chapels could be arranged either according to the narrative of Jesus's life, or according to the order in which pilgrims visited the sites in fifteenth-century Jerusalem. Either arrangement approached the issue with the plain ken.<sup>53</sup>

Other sets of stations of the cross were set up in Córdoba and in Messina. One shrine with the stations of the cross had been built on the island of Rhodes;

50 Gottfried Kentenich, *Aus dem Leben einer Trierer "Patrizierin"* (Trier: Lintz, 1909), 4–6.

51 *Questi sono li Misteri che sono sopra el Monte de Varalle* (Milan: Gottardo da Ponte, 1514).

52 De Klerck, "Jerusalem in Renaissance Italy," 222–27 (fig. 9.4–5).

53 Francesco Suriano, *Treatise on the Holy Land*, trans. Theophilus Bellorini and Eugene Hoade (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1983), 102–42. See Santino Langé, *Sacri Monti Piemontesi e Lomabrdi* (Milan: n.p., 1967); Tsafra Siew, "Translations of the Jerusalem Pilgrimage Route at the Holy Mountains of Varallo and San Vivaldo," in *Between Jerusalem and Europe: Essays in Honour of Bianca Kühnel*, ed. Renana Bartal and Hanna Vorholt (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 113–32, [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004298187\\_008](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004298187_008); Rudolph Wittkower, "'Sacri Monti' in the Italian Alps," in *Idea and Image: Studies in the Italian Renaissance*, ed. Margot Wittkower (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1978), 174–83. For "topographical order," see Rudy, "Guide to Mental Pilgrimage," 494–515; Kathryn M. Rudy, "A Pilgrim's Memories of Jerusalem: London, Wallace Collection MS M319," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 70 (2007): 311–25, <https://doi.org/10.1086/JWC120462767>

it was thought to be an accurate copy of the processional route in Jerusalem, which was believed to have been the path walked by Jesus carrying his cross to his execution. In 1504, a copy of the Rhodes shrine was built in Fribourg, in Switzerland. In 1515, a French merchant visiting that city went home to Romans-sur-Isère to build a copy of the Fribourg shrine, a copy of a copy of a copy of the Jerusalem route. All three shrines included seven columns spaced apart, each representing an event of the Passion narrative, with the seventh at a Calvary, the site of Jesus's execution. The French shrine's Calvary was erected on a purpose-built hill. That complex proved so popular with enthusiastic visitors that the shrine's administrator himself went on pilgrimage to Jerusalem, in 1517, with an architect and a bricklayer, to measure distances between sites, to be able to space the columns correctly. He added seventeen more stations of the cross to the complex, and increased its reputation for accuracy: one guidebook for pilgrims to Romans-sur-Isère boasted that the dimensions of the Holy Sepulchre there and in Jerusalem were identical.<sup>54</sup> Miracles further confirmed the verisimilitude. One grieving father prayed that his deceased son be restored to life, offering to take his resurrected son to the Romans-sur-Isère shrine's Calvary and leave there a two-pound wax image as an offering. After the prayer, he discovered the shroud wrapping the corpse had become covered with crosses, inside and out, and then the boy returned to life.<sup>55</sup>

This plain-ken delight in precise, if ugly, measurements existed in a deep-ken space where the original tomb consonated with its copies. Like with musical intervals, the copies were not the same size as the original, but some fraction of it. Deep-ken beautiful numbers like three and five thus remained in the architecture: the tomb at Florence was one third of the original size, and that at Görlitz, one fifth.<sup>56</sup> The "chord" between original and copy could even be inverted. When Nuremberg pilgrim Hans Tucher (1428–91) beheld Jesus's tomb in Jerusalem in 1479, he was impressed not by how closely the copies he had seen resembled it, but by how much it resembled those copies: the Jerusalem tomb

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54 *Le Voyage et Oraisons du mont de Calvaire de Romans en Dauphiné* (Paris: Gillet Couteau, 1516), fol. 204.

55 Pnina Arad, "Is Calvary Worth Restoring? The Way of the Cross in Romans-sur-Isère, France," in *Between Jerusalem and Europe: Essays in Honour of Bianca Kühmel*, ed. Renana Bartal and Hanna Vorholt (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 154–72, [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004298187\\_010](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004298187_010); Ulysse Chevalier, *Notice historique sur le Mont-Calvaire de Romans* (Montbéliard: Hoffmann, 1883); Archange de Clermont, *Le Transport du Mont-Calvaire de Hierusalem en France* (Lyons: Didier, 1638), 548–52; Jacques Foderé, *Narration historique et topographique des couvents de l'ordre S.-François, et monastères S.-Claire, érigés en la province anciennement appelée le Bourgongne* (Lyons: Rigaud, 1619), 612–17; Karl Alois Kneller, *Geschichte der Kreuzwegandacht* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herdersche, 1908), 202–04.

56 Gunhild Roth, "Das 'Heilige Grab' in Görlitz," in *Der Jakobuskult in Ostmitteleuropa*, ed. Klaus Herbers and Dieter R. Bauer (Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 2003), 259–84.

“very much equals the one in Eichstätt.”<sup>57</sup> This plain-ken interest in the actual spatial dimensions of the Holy Sepulchre was balanced by a deep-ken interest in geometrical perfection: the precise measurements, achieved at great expense and labour, were subsequently “improved” during the design of the replica.<sup>58</sup> Of course, the very desire to have the two sets of measurements consonate was fundamentally deep-ken oriented in the first place.

## Inscriptions

Some places were linked to Jesus through the presence of an inscription. In Islam, the preference for writing over images as the most appropriate decoration extended from Qur’ans into buildings. Mosques tended to be more inscribed than churches, and often had no other decoration. Scholars today sometimes struggle to come up with explanations that connect the text of the inscription to the function of the buildings or of the architectural elements nearby.<sup>59</sup> One possibility is that memory assisted imperfect literacy: a reader who managed to understand the first word of an inscription might have recourse to memory to supply the rest. Typically, these inscriptions would be in Arabic, but we see Chinese in the Songjiang Mosque, in southern Shanghai, from the Yuan dynasty: two screens surround its northern gate, with the inscriptions 清真寺 (mosque) and 清妙原真 “the clear and mysterious original truth,” a reference to God.<sup>60</sup>

Outside of mnemonics, any Islamic inscription stressing the unity of God that was created in a context where Christians were nearby was likely to have been intended to defend Jesus’s humanity against assertions of his divinity. For example, Qur’an 112 appeared frequently on tombstones: “Say! He is Allah, The One and Only; Allah the Eternal, Absolute; He begets not, Nor is he begotten...”<sup>61</sup> The implication was that Jesus was not God. A prominent Jesus inscription could

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- 57 Quoted in Helmut Flachenecker, “Das Schottenkloster Heiligkreuz in Eichstätt,” *Studien und Mitteilungen zur Geschichte des Benediktinerordens* 105 (1994): 65–95 (84).
- 58 Robert Tavernor, *On Alberti and the Art of Building* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1998), 106–19. Every aspect of this account—the date, the surveyors, the connection with Alberti—has been questioned by scholars.
- 59 Nina Ergin, “Multi-Sensorial Messages of the Divine and the Personal: Qur’an Inscriptions and Recitation in Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Mosques in Istanbul,” in *Calligraphy and Architecture in the Muslim World*, ed. Mohammad Gharipour and İrvin Cemil Schick (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2013), 105–18 (106), <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781474468428-008>
- 60 Barbara Stöcker-Parnian, “Calligraphy in Chinese Mosques: At the Intersection of Arabic and Chinese Calligraphy,” in *Calligraphy and Architecture*, ed. Gharipour and Schick, 139–58 (150), <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781474468428-010>
- 61 Elaine Wright, *Islam: Faith, Art, Culture: Manuscripts of the Chester Beatty Library* (London: Scala, 2009), 97.

also express a message in polytheistic South Asia. In 1389, a dome mausoleum was built in Delhi's Hauz Khas Madrasa complex for the late Firuz Shah (1309–88). Its design sports large medallions on which were inscribed hadith describing the world as a cursed prison to be escaped through prayer, alongside the names of Jesus and the other prophets. A smaller medallion declares that there is no God but Allah, and "Jesus is the spirit [*ruh*] of Allah."<sup>62</sup>

### Minaret of Jam

The most famous monument of the Ghurid sultans, not far from the ruins of what may have been their summer capital, was the brick-and-terracotta Minaret of Jam, towering 65 m above a narrow mountain valley between Kabul and Herat. The Ghurids constructed it in the late twelfth century.

From an octagonal base 9.14 m in diameter wound two intertwining staircases up 159 steps (each) to a balcony surmounted by a series of high brick platforms. Only the slightly later Qutb Minar in Delhi has a higher brick minaret. Amid a symphony of stucco, brick, and glazed turquoise tiles can be read a number of inscriptions, in relief, in Kufic script, in bands varying between 1.5 to 3 m tall. The highest is the *shahada*. The middle layer points to victory (Qur'an 61:13) and to the greatness of Muhammad of Ghur (1144–1206), pioneer of the Delhi Sultanate.<sup>63</sup>

The lowest inscription on the shaft wraps Qur'an 19 around in a network of narrow bands, its text emphasizing the humanity of Jesus. Experts disagree on the original intent; how it would have been read in 1400 is no more certain. It might have been an expression of the Karramites' complex teachings on God's deep-ken essence and his deep-ken Creation. The surah was arranged such that Qur'an 19:35 occurred, unexpectedly, at the focal point in the decoration scheme: God "says only 'Be,' and it is." The phrase "'Be,' and it is" was a key tool used by the Karramiyya sect to work out the relationship between the deep-ken essence of God and plain-ken events. Here, and in half its occurrences in the Qur'an,

62 Anthony Welch and Howard Crane, "The Tughluqs: Master Builders of the Delhi Sultanate," *Muqarnas* 1 (1983): 123–66 (159); Maulvi Muhammad Ashraf Husain, *A Record of All the Qur'anic and Non-Historical Epigraphs on the Protected Monuments in the Delhi Province* (Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1999), 74–76 (no. 76).

63 Finbarr Barry Flood, "Ghurid Monuments and Muslim Identities: Epigraphy and Exegesis in Twelfth-century Afghanistan," *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 42 (2005): 263–94, <https://doi.org/10.1177/001946460504200301>; Werner Herberg, "Topographische Feldarbeiten in Ghor," *Afghanistan Journal* 3 (1976): 57–69; Ulrike-Christiane Lintz, "Survey – the Qur'anic Inscriptions Monument from Jām, Afghanistan," in *Calligraphy and Architecture*, ed. Gharipour and Schick, 83–102, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781474468428-007>

this phrase referred to Jesus, to explain how his extraordinary conception did not imply his divinity. In fact, the Karramiyya had been associated with the idea of an anthropomorphic God, which was dangerously close to the Incarnation. The idea that God had a body, in some sense, brought them, in the eyes of their many critics, in the direction of Christianity and of the idea that God himself was subject to change—temporal in nature.<sup>64</sup> Alternatively, the inscription's references to "disbelievers" could commemorate the victory over the Chauhans of Ajmir (1192) which began the conquest of India, bringing Hindu polytheistic subjects under Islamic rule: the text proclaims the triumph of monotheism against the polytheistic opponents. Perhaps by 1400, the inscription's motivation, if not its physical letters, was already obscure.

### Dome of the Rock

The Dome of the Rock is a shrine (not a mosque) on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, built in the seventh century by Christians from wood and marble, and decorated with tile in a Persian and Byzantine style. One contrary tradition held that Muslims had built it in response to the Holy Sepulchre—not as an imitation, but as an edifice of equal dignity.<sup>65</sup> Within was the rock upon which Isaac was to be sacrificed (Genesis 22) or from which Muhammad ascended into heaven. The shrine was not uncontroversial: Ibn Taymiyya (1263–1328) warned against circumambulating the Dome of the Rock, for such honouring of Jerusalem detracts from Mecca: if you pray on the Temple Mount, it should be at the al-Aqsa Mosque.

The octagonal building houses an ambulatory arcade defined by eight piers and sixteen columns.<sup>66</sup> At the top of the arcade is a band of inscriptions, extending for a length of 240 m. The inscriptions repeat Qur'anic defences of the humanity of Jesus: God "bears witness that there is no God but him" (3:18), God "who has no child nor partner in His rule" (17:111), "it would not befit God to have a child. He is far above that" (19:35), God "begot no one" (112:3). The east side displays an extended quotation that makes the implications explicit: "do no say anything about God except the truth: the Messiah, Jesus, son of

64 Flood, "Ghurid Monuments," 272–83; Wilferd Madelung, *Religious Trends in Early Islamic Iran* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1988), 39–43.

65 This is from the tenth-century geographer Al-Maqdisi. Mukaddasi, *Description of Syria*, trans. Guy Le Strange (London: Palestine Pilgrim's Text Society, 1886), 22–23.

66 Charles D. Matthews, "A Muslim Iconoclast (Ibn Taymiyyah) on the 'Merits' of Jerusalem and Palestine," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 56 (1936): 1–21 (5); Suleiman A. Mourad, "Dome of the Rock," in *Medieval Islamic Civilization*, ed. Josef W. Meri, 2 vols. (New York: Routledge, 2006), I, 212–14.

Mary, was nothing more than a messenger of God, His word, directed to Mary, a spirit from Him. So believe in God and His messengers and do not speak of a 'Trinity'—stop [this], that is better for you—God is only one God, He is far above having a son..." (4:171). The inscription also goes beyond the Qur'an to invoke God's blessings on "your Prophet and your servant Jesus son of Mary."

Assertions of the unity of God are always potentially anti-Christian; here, in this city prominent in both subcults, the references to Jesus the messenger makes this message explicit. These are the earliest extant dated Qur'anic references. Perhaps these were written for local Christians and Jews, but they were difficult to read: in an elusive Kufic script, awkwardly positioned high above the arches. Presumably their purpose was not a plain-ken transfer of meaning to humans, but rather to reflect an absolute deep-ken power in language, regardless of the presence of human audience.<sup>67</sup> (See Chapter 10.)

## Florence under Jesus Rule

So far, this chapter has focused on the design and intentionality behind structures related to Jesus, either by events in his life, or by ongoing worship of him. We turn finally to a place that had a more direct and immediate relationship to Jesus, Florence, a favoured city which he protected and ruled.

Cosimo de' Medici (1389–1464) became the *de facto* ruler of Florence in the 1430s, and, in 1492, his great-grandson Piero (1472–1503) inherited his power. Two years into his reign, the French king Charles VIII (1470–98) invaded Tuscany. Piero, unable to find political support in a city increasingly under the sway of the Dominican preacher Girolamo Savonarola (1452–98), surrendered two towns and four fortresses to the French king, provoking widespread disapproval. On 9 November 1494, the feast of San Salvatore (the Holy Saviour), Jesus finally frightened Piero de' Medici into fleeing the city. In celebration, the new republic designated that day a special holiday, to celebrate Jesus saving Florence from Piero's incompetence.<sup>68</sup>

Thus began the first, Savonarolan, republic (1494–96). Savonarola advised Florence to take [*piglia*] Jesus himself as their king, to replace rule by the Medici, who, he charged, had opposed the cult of Jesus. Savonarola conceded

67 Erica Cruikshank Dodd and Shereen Khairallah, *The Image of the Word*, 2 vols. (Beirut: American University Beirut, 1981), I, 21–25; Oleg Grabar, *The Dome of the Rock* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2006), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1pncpt1>; Oleg Grabar, "The Umayyad Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem," *Ars Orientalis* 3 (1959): 33–62 (54).

68 Giovanni Cambi, *Istorie*, ed. Ildefonso di San Luigi, 4 vols. (Florence: Cambiagi, 1786), IV, 6–7.



that monarchy was not a perfect form of government, especially in Italy where a king's intelligence would tend to make him a tyrant. If, however, Florence wanted a ruler, it should have the best ruler, Jesus. His argument took two approaches, both with the deep ken. First, he noted that for every category of things, one member of each category must be the "rule and measure." White was the measure of colours, and fire the measure of hot things. For governments, the measure was rule by God. His second argument looked to Old-New Testament consonance: Ps 2:6 reported God's statement that "I have installed my king on Zion." Savonarola also confirmed that Jesus "wanted" to rule Florence.<sup>69</sup>

In 1495, Savonarola announced that Jesus had become the king of Florence. This happened not through a political election, but as a necessary by-product of the personal reforms of the citizens. The Hall of the Grand Council was newly christened the "Hall of Christ." The *fanciulli*, the young boys enthusiastically following and enforcing the Savonarolan reform, roamed the streets singing a composition that attacked the excesses of Carnival and elevated Jesus, the new king. At the same time, Jesus's mother Mary served as queen of Florence. Indeed, Savonarola described a symbolically complex crown—with a heart miraculously made of many tiny hearts, and topped with a cross—that the Florentine people made for Mary, alongside their petitions for a more pious city.<sup>70</sup>

Jesus's rule conveniently made it inconvenient for anyone else to become king. Savonarola pointed out that anyone "who opposes this government opposes Christ."<sup>71</sup> The Savonarolan partisan Girolamo Benivieni (1453–1542) remarked that "where Christ is king there can be no tyrant," since the would-be tyrant would necessarily have to usurp the throne from Jesus himself.<sup>72</sup> Jesus's rule also removed any cause for the Florentines to be afraid, despite the dangerous times, for "we have a good King."<sup>73</sup>

After Savonarola's 1498 death, the Medici, represented by Piero's brothers Giovanni and Giuliano, returned to power in 1512. Their rule lasted fifteen years. In 1527, Florence once more threw out the Medici, and once more chose

69 Savonarola, *Prediche sopra Aggeo*, ed. Luigi Firpo (Rome: Belardetti, 1965), 409–28. See John Koenig, "Mary, Sovereign of Siena, Jesus, King of Florence: Siege Religion and the Ritual Submission (1260–1637)," *Bullettino senese di storia patria* 115 (2008): 79–92.

70 Girolamo Savonarola, *Compendio di rivelazioni (testo volgare e latino) e Dialogus de veritate prophetica*, ed. Angeli Crucitti (Rome: Belardetti, 1974), 77–80; Joseph Schnitzer, ed., *Quellen und Forschungen zur Geschichte Savonarolas*, 4 vols. (Leipzig: Duncker and Humblot, 1910), IV, 160.

71 Koenig, "Mary, Sovereign of Siena," 83.

72 Quoted in Donald Weinstein, *Savonarola and Florence: Prophecy and Patriotism in the Renaissance* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1970), 218–19.

73 Savonarola, *Prediche sopra i Salmi*, ed. Vincenzo Romano, 2 vols. (Rome: Belardetti, 1969–74), II, 201 (sermon 28).

Jesus as their king.<sup>74</sup> On 9 February 1528, in the great hall of the Palazzo Vecchio, previously the Hall of Christ, the head of the republic, Gonfaloniere Niccolò Capponi (1472–1529), proposed making Jesus the king of Florence, with Mary as his queen. He had been a Savonarola supporter, and gave a speech Savonarola would have applauded.<sup>75</sup> Where the earlier republic had made Jesus king in a subtle, spiritual way, the new republic chose to have a formal “election.”<sup>76</sup> The vote overwhelmingly supported his proposal, with 1100 ayes and only 18 nays. To commemorate, and cement, Jesus’s rule, an inscription was engraved in golden letters above the portal of the Palazzo, *YHS XPS Rex Populi Flor. S. P. Q. F. consensu deolaratus* [Jesus Christ declared king of the people of Florence, with the consent of the Senate and People of Florence].<sup>77</sup> Jesus’s supporters would confirm that support with an oath, and their names inscribed (by a proxy, for those absent) in an official registrar.<sup>78</sup> Such measures would help Jesus’s new kingdom last longer than the previous one.

In 1527, the San Salvatore feast was reinstated, and, the following year, legislation recognized the day of Jesus’s election as a holiday (9 February). Coins were minted with the crown of thorns, and authorities urged the formal prosecution of anyone dishonouring Jesus.<sup>79</sup> On 29 October 1528, Florence’s signoria approved a military banner with the IHS, the city’s red cross, and the word *libertas* [freedom], “which is born and has its origin in the said name of Yhs.”<sup>80</sup> One military oration (Luigi Alamanni, 28 January 1529) explicitly described the military power of this Name banner. New legislation (22 June 1529) reaffirmed and strengthened the relationship between the city and its king, recognizing that it was *particularissimo et specialissimo* [the most distinctive and special].<sup>81</sup>

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74 Koenig, “Mary, Sovereign of Siena,” 92–140.

75 Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Libri fabarum 72, fol. 234v.

76 For example, Michele Lupo Gentile, “Sulle fonti inediti della storia fiorentina di Benedetto Varchi,” *Studi Storici* [Pisa] 14 (1905): 421–71 (453); Bernardo Segni, *Storie fiorentine*, 3 vols. (Milan: Classici Italiani, 1805), III, 314; Benedetto Varchi, *Storia fiorentina*, ed. Lelio Arbib, 3 vols. (Florence; Nardi and Varchi, 1843), II, 293.

77 There are multiple versions of the text. This is from Segni, *Storie fiorentine*, III, 315. See Iacopo Nardi, *Istorie della città di Firenze*, ed. Agenore Gelli, 3 vols. (Florence: Felice Le Monnier, 1858), II, 143–45.

78 Lupo Gentile, “Sulle fonti,” 453; Nardi, *Istorie*, ed. Gelli, II, 143–45. See Koenig, “Mary, Sovereign of Siena,” 103–05; Cambi, *Istorie*, IV, 5.

79 Benedetto Varchi, *Storia fiorentina*, ed. Lelio Arbib, 3 vols. (Florence: Nardi and Varchi, 1843), II, 370–71; Eugenio Albèri, ed., *Relazioni degli ambasciatori veneti al Senato*, 3 series, 14 vols. (Florence: Clio, 1839), series 2, I, 25.

80 Florence, Archivio di Stato, Signori e Collegi, Deliberazioni in forza di ordinaria autorità 130, fol. 193r (29 October 1328); *Storie fiorentine*, I, 78.

81 Luigi Passerini, *Del Pretorio di Firenze* (Florence: Ricordi e Jouhaud, 1865), 49–50. See Koenig, “Mary, Sovereign of Siena,” 116, 139–40.

Jesus's election was a response to the challenges facing Florence. The second republic endured plague and siege until it ended in 1530. At one point, when the danger to the city subsequently increased, Jesus's supporters asserted that the relationship with Jesus had palpable results: Jesus had given power to the Ottoman Sultan Suleiman (1494–1566), the emperor's rival, to limit the imperial threat to Florence. In Siena, and in both Florentine republics, the people's great sin was their failure to appreciate the divine origin of their political good fortune.<sup>82</sup>

### Envoi

Eric Alfonso was born in March 2000 after his parents had tried to have a child for nine years without success. Mateus was born in early 2018 after his mother had experienced two miscarriages. Both boys' parents attributed their births to objects, respectively a milk sample and an image, sent from the Milk Grotto. One report tallied 450 miracles in 2017 alone, all linked to this place where Mary had once breastfed Jesus.<sup>83</sup> The Bethlehem milk cult endures today.

Jesus places were located in the intersections between the Christian world and the Muslim, between the deep ken and the plain, between hope and reality. Enthusiasts residing at these sites, or visiting them, or replicating them, used tactics from both kens to harness geographical power for a multitude of worldly and heavenly purposes. It can be difficult today to appreciate this sacred geography's reality. One scholar dismisses Jesus's rule of Florence as "a slogan and a rallying cry" that "could have no reality in the cockpit of politics." Some contemporary Florentines, however, would have disagreed, understanding Jesus to be their real king.<sup>84</sup>

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82 Savonarola, *Scelta di prediche e scritti*, ed. P. Villari and E. Casanova (Florence: Sansoni, 1898), 181; Varchi, *Storiafiorentina*, ed. Arbib, II, 293.

83 Christian Media Center, "The Milk Grotto, where families ask for the intercession of the Virgin Mary," online video recording, *YouTube* (15 May 2018), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gdeT8N0tqpc>

84 Lauro Martines, *Fire in the City: Savonarola and the Struggle for Renaissance Florence* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006), 107.

## 6. Internal Frontiers between Jews, Christians, Muslims

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Christopher Columbus's (1451–1506) world was not especially interested in voyages of discovery. Unevangelized Indigenous peoples at the margins of the Christian Far West were also at the margins of its attention. Rather, it was Muslims' and Jews' attitudes towards Jesus that provoked their fears and hopes. Christian efforts against the Muslims recur throughout Columbus's biography. He was a child in Genoa as that republic launched ships in response to Pope Pius II's (1405–64) call in 1460 for a crusade against the Ottomans, a largely futile effort attracting little additional support beyond that of Vlad the Impaler, Voivode of Wallachia (1428/31–76/77). Thirty years later, Columbus was present as Isabella I of Castile (1451–1504) wrested Iberia from Muslim rule. He was at her court in 1489 when an ultimatum arrived from the Mamluk Sultan Qaitbay (ca. 1416–96), that Christians in his realms would face persecution if she did not cease the reconquest in Iberia. Isabella explained that her reconquest was just, and sent a rich funeral cloth for the Holy Sepulchre. Columbus also witnessed the Queen's siege of Granada, the last holdout of Muslim Iberia.<sup>1</sup> For many, the expansion of the Jesus cult to a New World (see Chapter 7) was an accident and an afterthought.

This chapter looks at two "internal" frontiers of the Jesus cult. The first is the border between the Muslim and Christian subcults mingling in Anatolia and the Balkans, under the growing Ottoman Empire; this border is "internal" in that it runs between these two subcults. The second is the border between Jews and Christians in Spain; that border is "internal" in the sense that it occurs *within* a predominantly Christian society, between that subcult and a group mostly outside of the Jesus cult.

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1 Carol Lowery Delaney, *Columbus and the Quest for Jerusalem* (New York: Free Press, 2011), 25, 63, 65.

## Explaining Religious Frontiers

In my brain, perhaps implicitly reflected on the page, is an understanding of religious expansion that differs from the models dominant in historiography; it is closer, I think, to what was done and understood at the time.

A century ago, scholars wrote about the expansion of religion as a kind of “Conquest,” by which missionaries brought the new faith, struggled heroically, and eventually converted the local peoples into model Christians. Despite the simplicity and oversights of the “conquest” model, the historians who used it often wrote in much more nuanced terms than its critics later allowed.

A couple generations ago, this was replaced by a “Negotiation” model, in which missionaries and potential-converts were equal players in a dialogue process by which a new religion, nominally “Christian” but adapted to the new environment, was jointly created.

Neither model, especially not the latter, treats religion seriously. The conquest model thinks a baptism makes a Christian, and ignores the religious reality behind and underneath that; that is, the model prioritizes nominal confessional membership. The negotiation model talks about a religion that is just a human construct.

Although historians have tended to embrace fully one model or the other on principle, in practice, some encounters were historically more like Conquest, and others like Negotiation. In his history of Christian expansion, David Lindenfeld “finds that terms such as ‘syncretism’ and ‘hybridity,’” the results of Negotiation, are “still too general” and instead “proposes a more variegated vocabulary of cultural encounter.”<sup>2</sup> Drawing on a range of historical experiences, Lindenfeld offers eight basic ways that expansion could happen, which we can simplify by noticing that it tracks three variables. To classify an example of expansion, we look for a shift from the local and traditional to the foreign and new in terms of (1) how people formally identify themselves, (2) their religious beliefs and practices, and (3) the broader social and cultural values.

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2 David Lindenfeld, *World Christianity and Indigenous Experience* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2021), 7–30, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108917643>

|                               | FORMAL IDENTITY | BELIEF AND PRACTICE                               | SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT |
|-------------------------------|-----------------|---|-----------------------------|
| Resistance and Rejection      | very local      | very local  | very local                  |
| Selective Incorporation       | local           | mostly local, some foreign                        | local                       |
| Concentration of Spirituality | local           | local transformed by foreign                      | local                       |
| Vernacular Translation        | ?               | local and foreign transform each other (?)        | ?                           |
| Dual Religious Participation  | local + foreign | local + foreign                                   | local + foreign (?)         |
| Conservation of Form          | foreign         | mostly foreign (local seen through foreign lens?) | local                       |
| Selective Acculturation       | foreign         | mostly foreign, some local                        | mostly local (?)            |
| Acceptance and Commitment     | very foreign    | very foreign                                      | very foreign                |

Table 6.1 Lindenfeld Typology of Religious Expansion.

Some Indigenous peoples responded to Christianity and Islam by converting *and* resisting, to the hurt bewilderment of the Christians and Muslims. Underneath the abstractions of religious identification (“Christian,” “Muslim,” “monotheist,” “polytheist”), people’s actual behaviours were diverse and difficult to contain. A new Christian could, and perhaps usually did, welcome Jesus as a new power broker into the local pantheon without forsaking the rest of the pantheon, and without seeing any need for exclusive loyalty. The Late Traditional World, especially beyond the Jesus cult, was largely “polytropic,” seeking help from a multiplicity of spiritual resources.<sup>3</sup> Here *poly-* means “many,” and *-tropos* means

3 Michael Carrithers, “On Polytropy: Or the Natural Condition of Spiritual Cosmopolitanism in India,” *Modern Asian Studies* 34 (2000): 831–61, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X00003991>; David N. Gellner, “The Emergence of Conversion in a Hindu-Buddhist Polytropy: the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal, c. 1600–1995,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 47 (2005): 755–80, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s00104175005000344>

“turning,” used for the point where the sun “turns” around after reaching its most northern, hence the English word “tropics.” This can occur even in officially monotheistic societies, perhaps to the outrage of authorities. In Thailand in this period, the traveller Niccolò de’ Conti (ca. 1395–1469) marvelled at how everyone polytropically “worship idols” yet monotheistically “with their hands joined together say, ‘God in Trinity and His law defend us.’”<sup>4</sup> Polytropic peoples are similar to modern-day consumers who would go to a shopping centre and purchase bread from a bakery and then produce from a market, without any sense of betraying the baker. The monotropists, in contrast, would fulfill their shopping needs at a membership-only big-box store. This analogy is imperfect, as even the most comprehensive big-box empires today do not denounce disloyal shoppers as heretics.

One of the patterns revealed by this chart is that “religious” beliefs and practices change more easily than identity or society does. The descriptions of this chapter repeatedly confirm this observation: typically, polytropic peoples were happy to add a new possibility to the range of practices and beliefs, but were more reluctant, or even mystified by, any urgency to identify as “Christian” or “Muslim,” let alone embark on broad social and cultural reforms.

The historical reality, of course, was always more complex than our models (I say with the plain ken). At Calicut, in 1498, Vasco da Gama (ca. 1469–1524) and his away team were lead into a “church” to be shown an image presented as depicting Mary. They prayed before it, although his clerk João de Sá (fl. 1497–1514) was uncertain enough to mutter a disclaimer: “If this is a devil, I worship the true God.”<sup>5</sup> That is, de Sá sensed the confusion of religious practice, and found safety by reaffirming his formal identity. Further, the locals’ desire to obscure their practices from Church observation also blocks historians’ view, making it difficult to know what was actually happening.

This was neither conquest nor negotiation. For everyone, it was an unbundling of the two kens. Theologians and missionaries wanted to unbundle the religion’s deep-ken essence from some of the plain-ken additives accumulated through time. Potential converts were keen on the deep-ken technology (which has power), but less keen on the plain-ken wrap it came in. Both sides had disagreements between and within themselves, but they both used a similar

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4 Poggio Bracciolini, “The Travels of Niccolò Conti,” trans. J. Winter Jones, in *India in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. R. H. Major (London: Hakluyt Society, 1857), 11–13.

5 Fernão Lopes de Castanheda, *Historia do descobrimento e conquista da Índia pelos Portugueses*, 8 vols. (Lisbon: Rollandiana, 1833), I, 57. See Damião de Góis, *Chronica do serenissimo senhor rei D. Emanuel*, 2 vols. (Coimbra: Universidade, 1790), I, 92 (c. 40); *A Journal of the First Voyage of Vasco Da Gama, 1497–1499*, trans. E. G. Ravenstein (London: Hakluyt, 1898), 53–54.

logic. Neither side was negotiating an imagined, or power-based, plain-deep relationship: both were trying to figure out how to solve a real plain-deep issue.

## Blurry Borders on the Black Sea

### Background

#### *Anatolia*

In the eleventh century, Anatolia was mostly Christian, under Byzantine rule (see Fig. 6.1). As the Byzantine state weakened, Muslim Turkic and Turkmen peoples moved in, further weakening it. The intermixing of Christian and Muslim ideas and peoples attended this process from its earliest days. In its origins, the Ottoman state united the *ghazi* warriors, from the various emirates of Anatolia, drawn to the western frontier of Islam by its religious and political opportunities. If Christian fighters were not part of the Ottoman movement at its inception, its rapid expansion and consequent need for trained soldiers meant they soon would be. Some sources remember Christian warriors joining their Muslim counterparts under the overlordship of Osman, the first Ottoman Sultan, to push against the crumbling Byzantine Empire. The Ottomans borrowed much of their governing apparatus from the Byzantines, so the change of rule had little consequence for the Christian peasants. In 1400, Trebizond, a tiny Christian empire, was so influenced by Persian and Muslim-Anatolian culture that historians have described it as a Greek “emirate.” The Ottoman conquest of Aydin gave the growing state a strong naval potential, and, in the 1380s, Christopoulis fell.<sup>6</sup>

Further east, the Muslim Aq Qoyunlu, the “White Sheep” Turkmen, ruled a largely Christian (Jacobite and Armenian) population around Diyar Bakr, to the north of the Black Sheep, south of Georgia, west of the Timurids, and east of the Ottomans. The “Black Sheep” Kara Qoyunlu, Turkmen with leanings towards Shi’ism, held the lands east of Lake Van until the last third of the fifteenth

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6 Michael Angold, “Byzantium in Exile,” in *The New Cambridge Medieval History V, c. 1198–c. 1300*, ed. David Abulafia (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1999), 543–68 (547); Cemal Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds: The Construction of the Ottoman State* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996); Heath W. Lowry, *The Nature of the Early Ottoman State* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2003), 61, 136, <https://doi.org/10.1353/book4635>; Nevra Necipoğlu, *Byzantium between the Ottomans and the Latins: Politics and Society in the Late Empire* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2009), 24–25, <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511576720>; Speros Vryonis, Jr., “Nomadization and Islamization in Asia Minor,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 29 (1975): 41–71 (57–58).



century, when the Aq Qoyunlu defeated them to create a state that included all or parts of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and northwest Persia.<sup>7</sup>



Fig. 6.1 Anatolia Map, by Taf Richards, Arcane Atlas Cartography (@Arcane\_Atlas), CC BY-NC.

### Balkans

The Christian Balkans could present no consistently strong front against the Muslims. These principalities were disunited, and none had much of a state infrastructure on the ground. Some cities applied to Venice for membership in its empire, but Venice avoided opposing the Ottomans except when it made commercial sense. Many Balkan Christians saw no advantage in being ruled by Christian neighbours rather than being vassals to the Turks: sending troops, money, and hostages as tribute was well worth the protection, though imperfect, that the Ottomans would extend in exchange.

The Balkans had a relatively low number of priests, and what priests they had were often from different subcults, and in competition against each other. In Bosnia, Orthodox and Roman Catholic priests had to compete with an indigenous Church of Bosnia. The Bosnian Church was mostly monastic, and probably neither sought nor had much influence on the population beyond

7 George Bournoutian, *Concise History of the Armenian Peoples* (Costa Meza: Mazda Publishers, 2002), 111–12; John E. Woods, *The Aqquyunlu: Clan, Confederation, Empire* (Minneapolis, MN: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1976), 119.

the monasteries' walls. Franciscans accused the Bosnian Church of a variety of errors—rejecting the mass, the Old Testament, icons, and the cross—and it might have leaned towards Manichaeism, but the most problematic difference was the Bosnians' refusal to accept papal authority. In 1459, King Stephen Tomašević (d. 1463), hoping to earn Roman support against the Ottomans, seized the Bosnian Church's lands and exiled any clergy who declined to convert to the Christianity of Rome. The paucity of priests and ecclesiastical plurality probably weakened local Christianity and quickened Islamization.<sup>8</sup>

### The Conquest of Constantinople

The Ottoman victory at Kosovo in 1389 allowed for their rule over much of the Balkans, and in the next two decades they would besiege Constantinople a half dozen times. The population of Constantinople had mixed views on how to respond to the growing Ottoman power. Some, especially the social elites, preferred to seek help from the Latin West to resist the Ottomans. Others, especially the more socially modest, preferred to surrender. In that surrender they saw "freedom," freedom from the slavery that could come with defeat (Muslim law prevented the enslavement of a surrendered city), and even freedom from corrupt Byzantine government. In 1402, the Ottoman siege was lifted by the intervention of Mary, Jesus's mother, and proposals for encouraging her future participation in the city's defence were considered, including a focus on social welfare. Demetrios Chrysoloras (ca. 1360–1416) argued that "If we offer the proper things to the all-pure one [Mary], she will deliver us not only from our present misfortunes, but also from those expected in the future. And how will this happen? If those who possess do not revel in their possessions by themselves, but share them with those who do not possess."<sup>9</sup>

In 1393, the Ottomans took Nicopolis from the Bulgarians. To take it back, a coalition of western powers, led by Sigismund of Hungary (1368–1437) and Charles VI of France (1368–1422), joined forces under a papal call for crusade. Some of the participation, especially Venice's and Genoa's naval support, was motivated by commercial interests, and their rival Milan allegedly tipped off the

8 John Fine, *The Late Medieval Balkans* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 395, 484–85, 582; Georgi Minczew, "John the Water-Bearer (ИВАНЪ ВОДОНОСЪЦЪ): Once Again on Dualism in the Bosnian Church," *Studia Ceranea* 10 (2020): 415–24, <https://doi.org/10.18778/2084-140x.10.20>; Andrew Wachtel, *The Balkans in World History* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008), 62, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780195158496.001.0001>

9 Paul Gautier, "Un récit inédit sur le siège de Constantinople par les Turcs (1394–1402)," *Revue des études byzantines* 23 (1965): 100–17; Necipoğlu, *Byzantium*, 114, 146, 174, 182, 207, 285–86.

Ottomans about the crusaders' plans. The battle was witnessed by luminaries from both sides of the Jesus cult. Ibn al-Jazari (1350–1429) was there with the sultan, and Oswald von Wolkenstein (1376/77–1445) fought there. The results were disastrous for the Christians, although Sigismund escaped with his life, if not his dignity. Breaking with custom, Bayezid I (ca. 1360–1403) declined to require the prisoners, as a condition of their freedom, to swear oaths against taking arms against him again; the confident Sultan looked forward to renewed violence, as it would justify expansion of his empire.<sup>10</sup>

In 1453, the Ottoman Sultan Mehmed II (1432–81), armed with a particle from Jesus's seamless tunic, conquered Constantinople.

Churches that were, or could be, understood to have once been Muslim mosques were seized, although early in the next century the Ottomans pointedly left Jerusalem's Holy Sepulchre and Bethlehem's Church of the Nativity in Christian hands. The Pammacaristos Church was given to the patriarch by the conquering Sultan Mehmed II. In 1490, his son Bayezid II (1447–1512) demanded the church, but backed off when its patriarch Dionysius I of Constantinople (d. 1492) proved Mehmed's earlier gift. Bayezid contented himself with merely removing the cross from the dome. The Christian decoration of the Hagia Sophia mostly survived, except for the disfiguration of the faces of Jesus and others. More offensive mosaics were covered by whitewash and plaster, which has allowed them to survive intact; others, less offensive, were allowed to stand visible, and were obliterated by time, dust and grime, or earthquakes.<sup>11</sup>

Some Christians felt the loss keenly. A number of locals saw the conquest as God's punishment for agreeing to unite with the Catholic Church at Florence. From Rome, Pius II wrote the Sultan to persuade him to convert to Christianity (ca. 1461–62): "The prophets predicted that Christ would die and that he would rise from the dead. The gospels affirm that he died on the cross, was buried, and arose on the third day. This is certain and there is no room for ambiguity; everything accords with the truth. The Lord rose again, ascended into heaven, and will come back again to pass judgment at the end of the world. Your religion does not accept this because it does not know about Christ what it should know." It is not certain the letter was ever sent.<sup>12</sup>

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10 Aziz Suryal Atiya, *The Crusade of Nicopolis* (London: Methuen and Co., 1934), 13, 107.

11 Oded Peri, "Islamic Law and Christian Holy Sites: Jerusalem and its Vicinity in Early Ottoman Times," *Islamic Law and Society* 6 (1999): 97–111; Steve Runciman, *The Great Church in Captivity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1988), 188–89.

12 Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini, *Epistola Ad Mahomatem II* (Epistle to Mohammad II), ed. and trans. Albert R. Baca (New York: Peter Lang, 1990), 59–60. See Necipoğlu, *Byzantium*, 221.

Mehmed did not convert. He did, however, enjoy religious discussion. Once he hosted a theological debate between Christian theologians, who discussed, for example, whether Jesus wore a beard. A more innovative idea came from the enterprising Greek scholar George Amiroutzes (1400–70), who had been invited to the Sultan’s court as a reward for persuading the emperor of Trebizond to surrender. Amiroutzes proposed a plan for synthesizing Christianity and Islam into a single religion. He argued with the plain ken: religious differences were a result of faulty translations of both subcults’ canons, exacerbated by the treacherous Jews. His proposal fell on deaf ears on both sides: the Muslims were uninspired, and the Greeks considered him a traitor, given a long history of questionable behaviour. Mehmed decided to stay with traditional Islam.<sup>13</sup>

### Converting to(wards) Islam

The Ottomans never developed a systematic program for conversion. The Sufis were valuable for expanding and deepening the presence of Islam, but religious dialogue and conversion happened incidentally in the course of their work on infrastructure, on building roads and hospices. Conversion to Islam involved ablutions, circumcision for the men, the declaration of the *shahada*, and taking up a new name. To signal their rejection of Christianity, converts were forced to stamp on girdles that had been cut and re-assembled in the form of a cross. Conversion was mostly voluntary, although facilitated by social and economic encouragements. Some conversions happened through the enslavement of children to form the janissary infantry corps. Established before 1400, janissaries were reformed by Murad II (1404–51) as a way to transform male Christian peasants into Muslim warriors.<sup>14</sup>

One fourteenth-century historian bemoaned the post-conquest collapse of Christianity: “What a frightful decline! [...] Fifty-one metropolitanates, eighteen archbishoprics, and four hundred and seventy-eight bishoprics are desolate [...] Christ’s peoples, that is the Christians, have been utterly destroyed.” Today, historians’ views are more nuanced and moderate. Christianity survived 1453, despite hostile locals, exiled bishops, seized churches, and restricted income. By the 1520s, Istanbul’s population was some 60% Muslim, 30% Christian, and

13 Vatican, Archivio della Sacra Congregazione de Propaganda Fide, SC Servia II, fol. 242v–43r. See Runciman, *Great Church*, 183.

14 Johann Schiltberger, *The Bondage and Travels of Johann Schiltberger*, trans. J. Buchan Telfer (London: Hakluyt, 1879), 74–77. See Selim Deringil, “‘There Is No Compulsion in Religion’: On Conversion and Apostasy in the Late Ottoman Empire: 1839–1856,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 42 (2000): 547–75 (554–55), <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417500002930>; Lowry, *Nature*, 139.

10% Jews; Anatolia was 93% Muslim and 7% Christian, with merely hundreds of Jewish households. Rural Christian populations were particularly slow to give up their religion, and their language; some modern Turkish words for agricultural vocabulary have Greek origins from this period.<sup>15</sup>

Conversion was slower and more superficial in the Balkans than in Anatolia. The Balkans saw little conversion in the first century of Ottoman rule. In the 1520s, Ottoman Europe was only 18% Muslim. A typical city in the Balkans might reach 50% Muslim around 1550. In the early sixteenth century, perhaps a quarter or a third of Balkan Muslims were converts from Christianity. Albania and Bosnia had the fewest Christian priests per capita, and saw the greatest percentage of conversions: two thirds of Albanians and half of Bosnians would become Muslim during the seventeenth century. The Christian nobility of the Balkans steadily converted from the beginning of our period until the middle of the sixteenth century, when almost all the Albanian, Serbian, and Bulgarian elites had become Muslim.<sup>16</sup>

### Polytropism

Slow conversion, popular religious practices unlikely to impress the authorities, and the dramatic political and economic shifts of the time all promoted circumstances right for polytropic practices. Already in 1400 we can see, around concentrations of ostensibly pure Islam and Christianity in the urban centres, a hybridity that drew from both subcults. In the fourteenth century, the initiation ceremony at Ankara into the Muslim Ahi “Brethren” included a tonsure suggestive of Christian monks, and three-legged candlesticks suggestive of the

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15 Calculations are based on data from Ömer Lütfi Barkan, “Essai sur les données statistiques des registres de recensement dans l’Empire ottoman aux XVe et XVIe siècles,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 1 (1957): 9–36 (20), <https://doi.org/10.1163/156852057X00038>. See Evgeni Radushev, “Conversion to Islam as a Social Process,” *Bulgarian Historical Review* 36 (2008): 3–20; Speros Vryonis, Jr., “The Byzantine Legacy and Ottoman Forms,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 23 (1969–70): 279–80, 297; Speros Vryonis, Jr., *The Decline of Medieval Hellenism in Asia Minor and the Process of Islamization from the Eleventh through the Fifteenth Century* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1971), 307; Vryonis, “Nomadization,” 57–58; Rıza Yıldırım, “Sunni Orthodox vs Shi’ite Heterodox?: A Reappraisal of Islamic Piety in Medieval Anatolia,” in *Islam and Christianity in Medieval Anatolia*, ed. A. C. S. Peacock, Bruno De Nicola, and Sara Nur Yıldız (Farnham: Routledge, 2015), 287–307.

16 Barkan, “Essai,” 20; Fine, *Late Medieval Balkans*, 484–85; Vryonis, “Byzantine Legacy,” 306; Wachtel, *Balkans*, 63.

Trinity.<sup>17</sup> We might view both Christianity and Islam here as subcult overlays draping a polytropic religious reality unconcerned about who believed what.

Even with conversion, there was still a great deal of overlap, with individuals participating in both subcults. In the early fifteenth century, the visiting Johann Schiltberger (1380–ca. 1440), whom the Ottomans had enslaved after Nicopolis, noted that new converts to Islam made an expanded declaration of faith, not only in the one God and Muhammad his chief prophet, but also in “the Messiah [Jesus] his servant, [and] Mary his maid.” In the 1430s, a Burgundian pilgrim reported that Muslim princes in southern Anatolia used baptism as a deodorant. This hybrid Islamochristianity declined, but did not disappear, during Mehmed II’s reign.<sup>18</sup>

Similarly, conversion rates in the Balkans conceal a partially polytropic world in which conversion was rarely deep and total. After the conquest, some supporters of the Bosnian Church, long opposed by Catholic and Orthodox Churches alike, became early adopters of Islam, perhaps with an intention to reconvert to Christianity if the Christian rulers returned. Only ever lightly Christianized, Albania was relatively easily, but lightly, Islamized, with lots of mixing and hiding: nominal Muslims left ex-votos at Christian shrines, but neglected the Ramadan fast, circumcision, veiling, and daily prayer. The Albanian noble Skanderbeg (ca. 1405–68) thought the Islamization of Kroja superficial enough to attempt to convert the converts back to Christianity. The Albanians were described as *laramanë* [dappled], because of their semi-polytropicism. Serbia saw similar trends, developing what has been described as a Muslim “crypto-christianity.”<sup>19</sup>

### Hurufism

Some Muslim movements in this milieu saw particularly Jesus-centric forms of belief and practice. Jesus returned to earth in Persia in the late fourteenth century in the form of a mystic named Fazlallah Astarabadi (1339/40–94), who

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- 17 G. G. Arnakis, “Futuwwa Traditions in the Ottoman Empire: Akhis, Bektashi Dervishes, and Craftsmen,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 12 (1953): 232–47 (240), <https://doi.org/10.1086/371156>; Ibn-Baṭṭūṭa, *Voyages d’Ibn Baṭṭūṭa*, ed. Charles Defrémery, 4 vols. (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1877), III, 264; Lowry, *Nature*, 138.
- 18 Bertrandon de la Broquière, *Le voyage d’outre-mer*, ed. Charles Henri Auguste Schefer (Paris: Leroux, 1892), 90, 115; Schiltberger, *Bondage and Travels*, 74–75. Lowry, *Nature*, 142, argues for full disappearance.
- 19 Albert Doja, “A Political History of Bektashism in Albania,” *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 7 (2006): 87–88, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14690760500477919>; Fine, *Late Medieval Balkans*, 556; William L. Langer and Robert P. Blake, “The Rise of the Ottoman Turks and its Historical Background,” *American Historical Review* 37 (1932): 468–505 (497–99); Stavro Skendi, “Crypto-Christianity in the Balkan Area under the Ottomans,” *Slavic Review* 26 (1967): 234–44.

also claimed to be the Mahdi, the redeemer expected to come before Judgment Day. The association made sense because the Qur'an (3:39 and 3:45) identified Jesus as a "word from God" and Fazlallah had penetrated the deep meaning of the thirty-two letters of the Perso-Arabic alphabet—this was not plain-ken linguistics, but a deep-ken reflection of truth, for the essence of the universe was combinations of letters. He realized that there was no mere coincidence involved in the fact that your mouth has thirty-two teeth, and that thirty-two, plus one (the number of unity), yielded thirty-three, the age of Jesus. Some of his knowledge came directly from Jesus, as a distinct person, who spoke with him in a bathhouse in a dream. Fazlallah's teachings became known as Hurufism, with *huruf* being the Arabic word for "letters," the basic units of his alphabetic Jesus mathematics. Jesus was a special prophet, resulting from the complete manifestation of the divine Word in Mary's womb. As the first motherly (*ummi*) prophet, Jesus's Incarnation is not unlike that of Eve, the first woman. Full revelation will come with Jesus's Second Coming, and at the end of time he will become the last motherly prophet as well.<sup>20</sup>

Hurufist ideas spread, and became dangerous. Fazlallah's son Amir Nurallah (fifteenth century) was arrested on suspicion of attempting to assassinate Shah Rukh (1377–1447), the Timurid emperor. During the interrogation, Amir Nurallah denied the apparently common rumour that Fazlallah, by then deceased, was in fact Jesus, and would descend from heaven in 1426–27. The authorities shipped Amir Nurallah off to the court of Ulugh Beg (1394–1449), where his Hurufism was carefully probed. One courtier corrected the idea of thirty-two letters, as the Chinese knew thirty-eight. The court accepted Amir Nurallah's rebuttal, that Rumi (1207–73) wrote of only thirty-two letters. Both sides of the debate were using a deep ken that found meaning in number of the true language's alphabet, without any sense that they disagreed over what the true language was. A parallel debate on the number of bodily orifices ended when some women present confirmed Amir Nurallah's inclusion of male nipples, which produced milk during infancy, and therefore counted. Thus, he was acquitted of the assassination charge, but was returned to Shah Rukh, who probably executed him anyway.<sup>21</sup>

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20 Hamid Algar, "Hurufism," *Encyclopedia Iranica*, 16 vols. (New York: Encyclopedia Iranica Foundation, 2003), XII, fasc. 5, 483–90; Shahzad Bashir, *Fazlallah Astarabadi and the Hurufis* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2005), 9–11; Irene Mélikoff, *Sur les traces du Soufisme turc: recherches sur l'Islam populaire en Anatolie* (Istanbul: Isis, 1992), 169–80; Orkhan Mir-Kasimov, "Words of Power: ḥurūfī Teachings between Shi'ism and Sufism in Medieval Islam: The Original Doctrine of Faḍl Allāh Astarābādī," in *Unity in Diversity: Mysticism, Messianism and the Construction of Religious Authority in Islam*, ed. Orkhan Mir-Kasimov (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 221–46.

21 Bashir, *Fazlallah Astarabadi*, 102–05.

The *Aşkname* [Book of Love], a ca. 1430 Turkish work claiming to be a translation of Fazlallah's Persian writings, described the return of Jesus, whom it quoted directly: "I came not to destroy the religion of God, but to fulfil it," an adaptation of Mt 5:17 ("Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them"). The *Aşkname's* Jesus added that God the Father would send a "paraclete" (variously interpreted as a reference to Muhammad, or to Fazlallah himself), and explicitly cited Jn 14, which it described as the "most authentic" gospel.<sup>22</sup>

The poet Imadaddin Nesimi (ca. 1369/70–1418/19) spearheaded the movement of this Hurufism into Anatolia. In general, it thrived there, although Nesimi, who liked to quote the Persian martyr-poet al-Hallaj (ca. 858–922), shared his fate, and was flayed to death at Aleppo in 1404–05 for his incarnationalism, the idea that God could take up human appearance.<sup>23</sup>

### Bektashism

In Anatolia, Hurufism survived in part by merging with an older order, the Bektashi, which proved to be even more influential. The order drew its name from the mystic Haji Bektash Veli (ca. 1209–71). His role in the creation of a Bektashi movement is not clear. Most scholars consider him to be not the actual founder, but a figurehead chosen later. Some identify the mystic Balim Sultan (1457–17) as the "real" founder of the Bektashi order, although a reasonably distinct Bektashi movement had existed for a century earlier.<sup>24</sup>

Although anachronistic, the conversions described in the *Vilayetname* [The Book of Sainthood] account of Haji Bektash's life reveal that at the time

22 John Kingsley Birge, *The Bektashi Order of Dervishes* (London: Luzac, 1937), 152, 216.

23 Algar, "Horufism," 483–90.

24 Hamid Algar, "The Ḥurūfī Influence on Bektashism," in *Bektachiyya: études sur l'ordre mystique des Bektachis et les groupes relevant de Hadji Bektach*, ed. Alexandre Popovic and Gilles Veinstein (Istanbul: Isis, 1995), 39–54; Irène Beldiceanu-Steinherr, "Les Bektaşî à la lumière des recensements ottomans (XVe—XVIe siècles)," *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 81 (1991): 21–79; Birge, *Bektashi Order*; Fahimeh Mokhber Dezfouli, "Alevism-Bektashism From Seljuks to Ottomans and Safavids," *Alevilik-Bektaşilik Araştırmaları Dergisi* 17 (2018): 33–50, <https://doi.org/10.24082/2018.abked.70>; Albert Doja, "A Political History of Bektashism from Ottoman Anatolia to Contemporary Turkey," *Journal of Church and State* 48 (2006): 423–50 (423), <https://doi.org/10.1093/jcs/48.2.423>; Suraiya Faroqhi, "Conflict, Accommodation and Long-term Survival: The Bektashi Order and the Ottoman State," in *Bektachiyya*, ed. Popovic and Veinstein, 171–84; Suraiya Faroqhi, *Der Bektaschi-Orden in Anatolien* (Vienna: Institutes für Orientalistik, 1981); Langer and Blake, "The Rise of the Ottoman Turks," 498; Mélikoff, *Sur les traces*, 51–78, 121–32; Irène Mélikoff, *Hadji Bektach: Un mythe et ses avatars* (Brill: Leiden, 1998).



they were added, perhaps around 1400, people associated Haji Bektash with conversion and proselytism. Similarly, Haji Bektash's contemporary Rumi also did missionary work, and the Mevlevi Order that traces its origins back to him did conversion work in cities. At least one Christian monk became Mevlevi while maintaining his Christian faith.<sup>25</sup>

The Ottomans used the Bektashi to assimilate their subject peoples, both to Islam and to Turkic culture, and to pray for the dynasty. The Bektashi were financially supported by the Ottoman state in the late fifteenth century. Their conversion approach was accommodationist and unusually open to non-normative beliefs. The Bektashi were sent by the religious authorities to make the Islamochristian tribesmen and rural Christians more orthodox—with success, although the open-minded teachers sometimes came to accept the very beliefs they had been sent to snuff out.<sup>26</sup>

The result was an astonishing mixture of the esoteric and the indigenous, a polytropic paradise of the pre-Islamic Turkic beliefs, indigenous Anatolian practices with roots in ancient paganism, Sufism, Buddhism, Christianity—Armenian and otherwise—and Manichaeism. Especially in the sixteenth century a Shi'ist influence developed so intensely as to deify 'Ali, the Prophet's cousin. The Bektashi pointed out parallels spanning the two major subcults: The twelve imams of local Shi'ism echoed the twelve disciples of Jesus, the virgin birth of Balim Sultan echoed the virgin birth of Jesus, and the God-Muhammad-'Ali combination echoed the Trinity. Some evidence even indicates beliefs in reincarnation and the transmigration of souls.<sup>27</sup>

Jesus stood amidst this whirlwind of beliefs. The *Vilayetname* relates a tradition of Jesus encountering a mountain that was suffering because in ancient times, the period of the Jewish Torah, a young man had prayed there. In some Bektashi interpretations, that young man was 'Ali. The suffering manifested itself in earthquakes and stream water turned bitter. Jesus prayed, and because his prayer always pleased God, the mountain calmed and the stream sweetened. The *Vilayetname* nearly quotes Jesus's "I am with you always" (Mt 28:20), by

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25 Erich Gross, ed., *Das Vilâjet-nâme des Hâğği Bektash: ein türkisches Derwischevangelium* (Leipzig: Mayer and Müller, 1927); Vryonis, "Nomadization," 64–66.

26 Doja, "Bektashism from Ottoman Anatolia," 429–30; Vryonis, "Nomadization," 64.

27 Birge, *Bektashii Order*, 217–18; Doja, "Bektashism in Albania," 85; Doja, "Bektashism from Ottoman Anatolia," 423–24; F. W. Hasluck, "Heterodox Tribes of Asia Minor," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 51 (1921): 310–42 (341), <https://doi.org/10.2307/2843453>; Langer and Blake, "The Rise of the Ottoman Turks," 498; Vryonis, *Decline*, 372.

saying, “Wherever you are we will be a companion to you.”<sup>28</sup> The *Vilayetname* also mentions that one of Bektash’s disciples, when going out as a missionary, was recognized by Christians as Jesus himself.<sup>29</sup> Some Christians, unsurprisingly, recognized Bektash as a Christian saint.

With the Bektashi poet Kaygusuz Abdal (1341–1444) we move towards a universalism rooted in his vernacular and unpretentious vision. In one poem, Kaygusuz Abdal claimed to be twenty-eight different things (“I am the rememberer and what is remembered [...] the hidden and the seen”) and insisted that twenty more were within him (“The spirit and the body, the proof and the evidence, / both profit and loss— / the whole marketplace is in me.”) The poem was exactly these forty-eight assertions. In it, Kaygusuz Abdal claimed membership in both subcults (“I am the Muslim. I am the Christian.”) and identity with Jesus (“I am the crucified saviour”). This goes far beyond inter-religious ecumenicism, as immediately after “saviour” he included “the good and the evil,” as either a possession or an identification; later he stipulated that “faith and faithlessness are in me.” In his cosmic vision, at once transcendent and immanent, “Truth satiates the world / The world is suffused with truth.”<sup>30</sup>

### Parallel Movements

Just after 1400, a preacher in Bursa, citing Qur’an 2:285 “We make no distinction between any of His messengers,” argued that Jesus and Muhammad were equal. Locals approved his message, but a visiting Arab overheard and was horrified. Regional support for the preacher’s assertion was so strong that the Arab had to travel all the way to Syria before he could find a legal authority to share his horror. In one account, the Arab finally settled the matter personally, and “slaughtered” the preacher “as a butcher doth a sheep.” When word reached the poet Süleyman Çelebi (1351–1422), he pointedly penned verses praising Muhammad’s birth, but even this orthodox defence proved popular in this

28 Birge, *Bektashi Order*, 44, 217.

29 This is Sari Ismail. See Gross, ed., *Das Vilâjet-nâme*, 163–68.

30 Jennifer Ferraro, ed. and trans., *Quarreling with God: Mystic Rebel Poems of the Dervishes of Turkey* (Ashland: White Cloud, 2007), 23–24, 100–01; Annemarie Schimmel, *Aus dem goldenen Becher: Türkische Gedichte aus sieben Jahrhunderten* (Cologne: Önel, 1993), 59–63; Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 335–36; Ahmet T. Karamustafa, “Kaygusuz Abdal: A Medieval Turkish Saint and the Formation of Vernacular Islam in Anatolia,” in *Unity in Diversity: Mysticism, Messianism and the Construction of Religious Authority in Islam*, ed. Orkhan Mir-Kasimov (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 329–42 (334), [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004262805\\_014](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004262805_014)

complex environment, all the way into the crypto-Christian Balkans. Even more bold, other Muslim theologians at the time asserted that Jesus was himself the greatest prophet.<sup>31</sup>

Such thinking sparked social unrest. In 1415 and 1416, revolts led by Badr al-Din (d. 1416) and Bürklüdje Mustafa (late fourteenth to early fifteenth century) broke out in Anatolia and Rumelia. They fired up their followers, poor Christians and Muslims, by calling for the communal holding of property and for the equality of both religions. In fact, they went beyond teaching equality: a true Muslim, worthy of salvation, was in harmony with Christianity and recognized it as a way to salvation. In their eyes, acceptance of Christianity became a part of Muslim doctrine. Badr al-Din's family included Christians, such as his wife, daughter-in-law, and mother—who later converted to Islam. Once, Badr al-Din stood on the Wallachian coast watching his ship being wrecked by hostile Christians. His captain was captured, but later released when Badr al-Din and Jesus jointly appeared in local ecclesiastical authorities' dreams to make an appeal. Badr al-Din was hailed as a new messiah. The Ottoman state, alarmed, suppressed the movement violently.<sup>32</sup>

These trends continued through the century. Around 1444, a Persian Muslim preacher was executed in Edirne for preaching Jesus. In 1495, reports, unreliable in their optimism, reached Rome that one or two dozen *qadis* had preached Christianity in mosques in Istanbul, amidst panic over a possible invasion by Charles VIII of France (1470–98).<sup>33</sup>

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- 31 Süleyman Çelebi, *The Mevlidi Sherif*, trans. F. Lyman MacCallum (London: John Murray, 1943); E. J. W. Gibb, *A History of Ottoman Poetry*, 6 vols. (London: Luzac, 1900), I, 232–34; Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, trans. Benjamin Stolz (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, 1975), 17–25; Schiltberger, *Bondage and Travels*, 75–76.
- 32 H. I. Cotsonis, "Aus der Endzeit von Byzanz: Bürklüdsche Mustafa, ein Märtyrer für die Koexistenz zwischen Islam und Christentum," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 50 (1958): 397–404; Harry Doukas, *Decline and Fall of Byzantium* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State UP, 1975), 120–21; Ernst Werner, "Häresie, Klassenkampf und religiöse Toleranz in einer islamisch-christlichen Kontaktzone," *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 12 (1964): 255–76. For the dream, see Han Joachim Kissling, "Das Menäqybnäme Scheich Bedr ed-Din's, des Sohnes des Richters von Samävnä," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 100 (1950): 112–76 (167–68).
- 33 Colin Imber, "A Note on 'Christian' Preachers in the Ottoman Empire," *Journal of Ottoman Studies* 10 (1990): 59–67 (59–60, 62–64). Kaygusuz Abdal also wrote several poems on—I mean, about—hashish, and was particularly keen to the limitations of language and rationality: "My speech is twisted nonsense, every word an unripe plum, and like a stork I'm always wandering far and wide."

### *Sultans against Polytypism*

Political elites eventually decided to fight such polytypic practices that went beyond traditional Islam. Around 1500, the Ottoman Sultan Bayezid II (r. 1481–1512) himself joined the Bektashi Order, and supported Balim Sultan's efforts to reform it into what they saw as greater orthodoxy. As the Ottoman state consolidated and sought a more robust commercial economy, it wanted a single law system—shariah law was especially attractive for its ability to incorporate local traditions—and religious eclecticism became unwelcome. Thus, in the 1510s, the collaborative relationship between the sultanate and the Bektashi ended. By then the Ottomans were also fighting the Shi'a Safavids, and the Bektashi's increasing enthusiasm for 'Ali made them suspect. Perhaps the Safavid Shah Ismail (1487–1524) himself had encouraged the Bektashi to include 'Ali in their unified Trinity. Ottoman financial support of the order came to an abrupt halt.<sup>34</sup>

East of the Ottomans, the Turkomen also became less willing to allow mixed religious views among their subjects. The Aq Qoyunly ruler Uzun Hasan (1423–78) ended a traditional policy of toleration when a need to win the support of the *ulama* scholars motivated him to limit the public Christian celebration of feast days, to increase taxes on Christians, and to require that they wear clothing that made their affiliation clear. To avoid confiscation of their estates, some Christian nobles took advantage of a Muslim legal mechanism, the *waqf*, to donate land to the Church, leading to a decline in the wealth of the Christian aristocracy alongside an upswing in the wealth of the Church. This prosecution would intensify under Uzun Hasan's successors.<sup>35</sup>

## Iberia

In terms of religious demography, Iberia was far from Anatolia. Instead of Muslim elites gaining influence in a majority Christian society, Iberia saw Christian elites ruling a majority Christian society, a dangerous power differential poised at the throat of the Jewish minority. Instead of promoting a conventional, "pure" form of Islam on a society accustomed to using multiple religious traditions, it saw

34 Doja, "Bektashism from Ottoman Anatolia," 430–36; Imber, "Note on 'Christian,'" 59–67; Mélikoff, *Sur les traces*, 17–50.

35 Bournoutian, *Concise History*, 112; Razmik Panoissian, *The Armenians: From Kings and Priests to Merchants and Commissars* (New York: Columbia UP, 2006), 66–73; Woods, *Aqqyunlu*, 168.

rulers promoting a pure form of Christianity that had no space for the Jewish tradition that had fathered it.

In the Far West, increased interest in Jesus's suffering directed attention to the Jews' role in his execution. Christian attitudes towards Jews were mixed. The Jews' failure to accept Jesus as the Messiah was sometimes tolerated, perhaps especially when the Christians were unaware of the Jewish perspective that the suffering servant of Isaiah 52–53 represented not Jesus, but the Jews themselves.<sup>36</sup> One early-fourteenth-century medical text, repeatedly published in the late fifteenth century, explained that Jews particularly had hemorrhoids because of excess anxiety, a lack of exercise, and the divine curse cited in Ps 78:66: "He beat back his enemies; he put them to everlasting shame."<sup>37</sup> Typically, Christians felt both a respect for the Jews' witness to the authority of the Old Testament, as well as a fear of the possibility of blasphemy and pollution by associating with them. Pope Innocent III (1161–1216), for example, reported rumours that Jews advised wet nurses to reroute their milk into the latrine for the three days after taking Communion.<sup>38</sup>

Jews were often under royal protection, and usually under papal protection, excepting of course those Jews who "presumed to machinate to disgrace the faith."<sup>39</sup> Theological hostility was getting worse: Denis the Carthusian (1402–71) explicitly specified that God did not intend for the Jews to murder Jesus; He only allowed it to happen, but the intention to murder—and the guilt for it—was theirs alone. Alonso de Espina (ca. 1410–64) divided the typical wrongdoings of Jewish converts to Christianity into three groups: the immoral, the Jewish, and the anti-Christian—the last category included especially crimes against the host.<sup>40</sup>

In 1400, the medieval story of the Wandering Jew remained current throughout Europe. Beyond many variations, the core story remembered a Jewish shoemaker mocking Jesus as he carried the cross to his Crucifixion; Jesus

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- 36 Robert Chazan, *Fashioning Jewish Identity in Medieval Western Christendom* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2003), 162–78, <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511496431>; Samuel R. Driver and Adolf Neubauer, ed., *The "Suffering Servant" of Isaiah According to the Jewish Interpreters* (New York: Hermon Press, 1877).
- 37 Bernard de Gordon, *Lilium medicinae* (Lyons: Rovillium, 1559), 519.
- 38 Robert Chazan, ed., *Church, State, and Jew in the Middle Ages* (West Orange: Behrman, 1980), 27–36.
- 39 For example, Gregory IX, 6 April 1233, "...dummodo nichil machinari presumant in ignominiam fidei Christiane..." in Solomon Grayzel, ed., *The Church and the Jews in the XIIIth Century*, rev. ed. (New York: Hermon, 1966), 202.
- 40 Christopher Ocker, "Ritual Murder and the Subjectivity of Christ: A Choice in Medieval Christianity," *The Harvard Theological Review* 91 (1998): 158–63; Nadia Zeldes, "The Former Jews of this Kingdom": *Sicilian Converts after the Expulsion, 1492–1516* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 222, <https://doi.org/10.1163/97890004476004>

cursed him, that he must wander aimlessly until Jesus returned. Known variously as Cartaphilus or as Giovanni Votaddio (“Beats God”), this unfortunate soul was repeatedly seen across the Far West. The earliest recorded spotting was in Armenia in the thirteenth century, and in our period was witnessed at least twice in Italy, at Mugello in 1413 and at Florence in 1414–16.<sup>41</sup> He was called the “eternal Jew” in eastern and central Europe, and the “wandering Jew” in western and southern Europe.

In Iberia, Christians seeking to convert Jews stressed that the Bible proved that Jesus was the Messiah and that reason itself demonstrated the necessity for his Incarnation. They underlined their argument by pointing out the Jews’ material poverty, consonant with their spiritual errors. A more recent argument—originating in thirteenth-century Barcelona—insisted that not only the Bible, but even the rabbinic writings known as the Haggadah, which Christians particularly disliked, showed that Jesus was the Messiah. This shifted the nature of the debates. The Christians were no longer arguing that Christianity was true: its truth was now obvious, and the new argument held that this obvious truth could be found in even the “worst” Jewish writings.

How did the medieval Jews respond? Some appealed to reason (the Trinity was illogical, and the Incarnation so irrational as to be obscene), and others attacked the morality of the supposedly superior Christians. Jews like the twelfth-century Jacob ben Reuben made their own translations of the New Testament, and underlined its contradictions. Many of their arguments were for the plain ken. The Vulgate Bible that the Christians used was a bad translation, they asserted. Furthermore, Christians ignored the historical context, and were quick to abandon the literal meaning for the figurative. The defenders of Judaism also evoked a plain-ken history in arguing that material success, the kind the Jews lacked, was no guarantee of truth.<sup>42</sup>

By 1392, the Catalan Christian scholar Francesc Eiximenis (d. 1409) had completed four books of a massive compendium of knowledge, planned in thirteen volumes to deep-ken echo the number of Jesus plus his twelve disciples. The first volume answered a rabbi’s argument that Jesus could not have been sent from God, for he was born in a humble place and lived a humble life with humble associates. That is, in this Jewish perspective, anyone with divine

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41 Salomone Morpurgo, *L'Ebreo Errante in Italia* (Florence: Dante, 1891), 28–40.

42 Robert Chazan, *The Jews of Medieval Western Christendom: 1000–1500* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2006), 255, <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511818325>; David J. Viera, “The Evolution of Francesc Eiximenis’s Attitudes toward Judaism,” in *Friars and Jews in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. Steven J. McMichael (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 147–59 (153), [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047400219\\_011](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047400219_011); Joshua L. Levy, “‘Sefer Milhamot Hashem’, Chapter Eleven: The Earliest Jewish Critique of the New Testament” (PhD thesis, New York University, 2004).

origins, of deep-ken significance, could not have an insignificant origin. Note that this reversed the medieval Jewish plain-ken arguments.<sup>43</sup>

Eiximenis responded vigorously. Jesus himself said (e.g., Mt 13:57) that a prophet was not honoured in his home. Eiximenis appealed to Jesus's human intentions: Jesus chose Nazareth as his home as an expression of humility, and for its peaceful backwater atmosphere. "Nazareth" meant "sprout," allegorically suggesting its fruitfulness. Furthermore, history gave numerous examples of great people from modest origins, including Alexander the Great—evidently Eiximenis did not think much of Macedonia. Eiximenis admitted that Christianity's geography was limited, extending only as far as Hungary, but noted that truth was not determined by geographical extent. He did concede, and regret, that Christians had less respect for the mass than the Jews had for the Sabbath.

From the late 1370s, popular preachers across Spain whipped up crowds' passions into an anti-Semitic fury. In 1388, Ferran Martínez, accused by more moderate voices of being out to "avenge the blood of Christ," asked his audiences, "Had not Jesus said to his disciples when he sent them to preach the Gospel that anyone who would refuse Jesus's reign should be viewed as His enemy and as a son of the devil?"<sup>44</sup> The 1390 death of their royal protector John I of Castile (1358–90) exposed the Jews' precarious position: intellectual enthusiasm for secular philosophy had weakened the Jewish religious identity, and socio-economic poverty had weakened their will to resist. The summer of 1391 was apocalyptic for Jews across Castile and Aragon, as mobs raged. Synagogues were destroyed or converted into churches. Thousands of Jews were killed. Thousands more allowed themselves to be baptized as an alternative, with varying sincerity or belief in the validity of a rite conducted under such duress.<sup>45</sup>

The polemical exchanges continued. Around 1400, Eiximenis was composing a new work, a life of Christ with a less aggressive tone. He stipulated that he did not believe the Jews desecrated the consecrated Eucharistic host, although their murder of Jesus condemned them anyway. Perhaps his pen was moderated by the plain-ken defeat of the Jews, or by their approaching doom with the year 1400 and the deep-ken power of its divisibility by 100.<sup>46</sup> The Jew Astruc Remoch converted and was baptized in 1391, taking the name Francisco Dias-Carni ("God-flesh")

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43 Francisc Eiximenis, *Primer del Crestià*, in Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional, MS 1790. See Viera, "Evolution," 149–55.

44 Paul of Burgos, *Scrutinium scripturarum* (Burgos: Philippum Iuntam, 1591), 521–26. This translation is from Benzion Netanyahu, *The Origins of the Inquisition in Fifteenth-Century Spain* (New York: Random House, 1995), 135–36, 200.

45 Chazan, *The Jews*, 106–10.

46 Francisc Eiximenis, *Vida de Jesucrist*, in Barcelona, Biblioteca Catalunya, MS 459 and 460. See Viera, "Evolution;" Pere Bohigas Balaguer, "Prediccions i profecies en

in honour of the Incarnation, and wrote a letter asserting that the Old Testament alone proved both the Trinity and the Eucharist's transubstantiation. Against it, Rabbi Solomon ben Reuben Bonfed replied that the convert so needed to "twist and distort the Bible text to establish the Trinity" that he could have just as well proved the "Quaternity." Just after 1400, Profiat Duran (ca. 1350–1415) wrote his satirical attack on Christianity, *Al-Tehi ka-Aboteka* [Be Not Like Your Fathers], with such subtlety that Christians long mistook it for a defence of Christianity, and would cite it approvingly.<sup>47</sup> In these years, the Jews in Toledo produced an apparently, conveniently, first-century letter revealing that their ancestors had in fact opposed the execution of Jesus in Palestine (see Chapter 4).<sup>48</sup>

### The Disputation at Tortosa

The surviving Jews had barely recovered when the Church pounced to save them, too. A new disputation was held in the city of Tortosa, in Aragon, in 1413–14. A recent convert, Gerónimo de Santa Fe (Joshua ben Joseph al-Lorqui, fl. 1400–30), was the lead disputant for the Christians. He had once written anti-Christian polemics, but with the conversion restarted his career as a writer of anti-Jewish polemics. Some Jews, horrified by his treachery, came up with a mnemonic re-arrangement of Gerónimo's name into "blasphemer." Pope Benedict XIII (1328–1423), in a disputed line of the papacy, presided over the Tortosa proceedings. Defeat would devastate Jewish morale and prompt harsh new legal persecution.<sup>49</sup>

When the rabbis arrived, saw the hundreds of ecclesiastical and secular officials enthroned against them and the scribes carefully recording their names and places of origin, "our heart melted and became water." Gerónimo began his opening speech with a threat from Isaiah 1: when the rabbis protested, the Pope

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les obres de fra Francesc Eiximenis," in *Aportació a l'estudi de la literatura catalana*, ed. Bohigas Balaguer (Barcelona: Abadia de Montserrat, 1982), 94–115.

47 Isaac Broydé, "Polemics and Polemical Literature," *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, ed. Isidore Singer, 12 vols. (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1901–06), X, 105–06; H. Graetz, *History of the Jews*, ed. Isidore Singer, 6 vols. (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1894), IV, 182.

48 "Carta que fiz traducir de caldeo en latin e romance el noble Rey Don Alfonso que la vila de Toledo conquirio e yaze en el armario del aiuntamiento de Toledo," in Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional, MS 838, fol. 2r–9v (two copies).

49 Hieron de Sancta Fide, *Hebraeomastix: Vinde Impietatis, ac Perfidiae Iudaicae* (Frankfurt: Ioachimium Bratheringium, 1602); Hyam Maccoby, ed., *Judaism on Trial: Jewish-Christian Disputations in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Littman, 1982), 168, 220. See Antonio Palacios López, *La Disputa de Tortosa* (Madrid: Arias Montano, 1957).



simply pointed out that they should not be upset by it since Gerónimo was in fact “one of you”—that is, a recent convert.

The rabbis were pragmatic. They abandoned their usual lively style of vigorous debate, and instead resolved to be respectful and even-tempered through the proceedings. Their caution doubled mid-debate, when they realized their words were being transcribed. Since they could neither verify the accuracy of the transcript nor question the reliability of a papal scribe, they “agreed to be guarded in our speech, and to keep silent as much as possible.” Unimpressed by their tactic, the Pope told them they could choose either to give forthcoming answers, or die. The rabbis hastily devised a new strategy: “Only one of us would speak, and if his words pleased the Pope, well and good.” If the answer annoyed the Pope, “we would say that his reply was not agreed by all of us, and that it was a mistake, and our opinion differed from his.”<sup>50</sup>

Benedict explained that the purpose was not to demonstrate the truth of Christianity, then obvious, but to show that the Talmud and Jewish tradition themselves proved that the Messiah had already come, a key step towards identifying Jesus as that Messiah. Joseph Albo, a leader of the Jewish side, protested that he had never objected to the idea of the Messiah having already come, and argued that messianism was not necessarily Jewish.<sup>51</sup>

The rabbis received some formal considerations. Because the Jewish law was older than the Christian law, the burden of proof was on Gerónimo to demonstrate why the Jews must abandon their tradition. Moreover, the prelates recognized the relativity of reason: Because the rabbis had not been trained in the Christian style of logic, the Pope told them they could ignore Gerónimo when he used logical syllogisms, but “when he speaks of proofs from tradition, answer him with tradition.”<sup>52</sup>

Let us listen in on the debate. Gerónimo points to the passage “The world will be not less than 85 jubilees, and in the last jubilee, he will come,” and the

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50 Maccoby, ed., *Judaism on Trial*, 178–79.

51 Joseph Sarachek, *The Doctrine of the Messiah in Medieval Jewish Literature* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1932), 212–15. See Brian Ogren, “The Forty-Nine Gates of Wisdom as Forty-Nine Ways to Christ: Giovanni Pico della Mirandola’s Heptaplus and Nahmanidean Kabbalah,” *Rinascimento* 49 (2009): 27–43 (33).

52 The rabbi Hasdai Crescas (1340–1410) had written a Castilian *Refutation of Christian Principles* that made a similar argument for the burden of proof: “if the evidences of both religions were equal in number, credibility, and cogency, and were it difficult to decide to which religion the verdict should go, the benefit of the doubt would be in favour of the more ancient faith, Judaism.” Maccoby, ed., *Judaism on Trial*, 171, 175. See Sarachek, *Doctrine of the Messiah*, 197; Carlos del Valle Rodríguez, ed., *La inconsistencia de los dogmas cristianos, de Crescas* (*Bitṭul Iqqare ha-Notšrim le-Rabbí Ḥasday Crescas*) (Madrid: Aben Ezra, 2000).

rabbis note that Jesus did not come at that time. Gerónimo, however, reminds them that the precise question is not whether Jesus was the Messiah but whether the Messiah has come. This confounds the rabbis, who cry out to the Pope, "If it was not Jesus—in whom some sign of greatness and wisdom appeared—who can it be? Matteo the madman, or Marvaste the fool?" The Pope, however, finds Gerónimo's distinction to be on point—and is frustrated that the rabbis do not understand Gerónimo, a fellow Jew. Benedict tells the rabbis that if they say that the Messiah has come, but is not Jesus, then Gerónimo will be happy to reveal the Messiah's identity.<sup>53</sup>

Frustrated, the rabbis go on the offence, and argue that the Talmud actually condemns the kind of chronological investigation that Gerónimo attempted. They cite the passage "Blasted be the breath of those who calculate the end!" The Pope exclaims, "O foolish Talmudists!"—which gives the rabbis an opportunity to question the entire proceedings: if the Talmud is "foolish," why is Gerónimo seeking to use it as an authority. This angers Benedict even more, although he enjoys the rabbis' clever follow-up: Daniel was a prophet, not a calculator.<sup>54</sup>

We should also get a sense of how both sides used the Talmud's text. The rabbis protested that Gerónimo was reading selectively. In citing one passage of messianic calculations, he omitted the conclusion, which negated them: "Through our many iniquities all these years have been lost. And because of the increase of our sins, all these years have been lost." This made such calculations invalid for determining whether the Messiah had already come. Gerónimo defended his selection with the plain ken: the valid first half of the verse was written by Elijah, and the second by the Talmudists, who added it only to prevent the first half's application to Jesus. The rabbis protested by appealing to skepticism: how could one know that Elijah did not write the entire verse? The authorship was thus in doubt. They explained that "it is the way of our Talmud that when an explanation is not compelling because of some difficulty made against it, the expression 'perhaps' is used, and no reply is made..." Underneath this doubt, however, they pointed out, with the deep ken, that it was more "fitting" that a single verse have a single author.<sup>55</sup>

The Pope judged in favour of the Christians. The entire proceedings was a heavy blow to the already devastated Jewish morale. Jews, even from among the group of disputing rabbis, converted in large numbers, before the debate had even concluded. Pope Benedict issued a bull in 1415 which outlawed the study of the Talmud, Jews' utterance of the name of Jesus, their manufacture of

53 Maccoby, ed., *Judaism on Trial*, 176; Palacios López, *La Disputa*, 31.

54 Maccoby, ed., *Judaism on Trial*, 176.

55 *Ibid.*, 172–73. The passage in question is from *The Babylonian Talmud: Seder Neziḳin*, ed. I. Epstein, 12 vols. (London: Soncino, 1935), II, 657 (97a–97b).

Communion chalices, and their public appearance without a distinctive badge. Physically forcing a Jew to convert was invalid. Encouraging a conversion by making death the alternative allowed the Jew to make a choice, and therefore, although Benedict admitted that the death threat itself was evil, such a conversion was legitimate.<sup>56</sup>

### After Tortosa

In the 1430s, royal and papal intervention was needed to specify that all Christians were Christian. This was the exception that proved the rule in an Iberia that continued to distinguish the “real” Christians of Christian families from the lesser Christians of convert families (*conversos*), with the latter often ineligible for public office and undesirable in marriage.<sup>57</sup> The Jews’ declaration in the Gospel of Matthew (27:25), “Let his blood be on us and on our children,” was understood as a binding oath that brought a curse upon even descendants of Jews who had converted to Christianity.<sup>58</sup> The *conversos* criticized these racial arguments by pointing out that Christianity had its origins in Judaism and Jesus had his origins in the Jews. Alfonso de Cartagena (ca. 1450; he was baptized as a boy when his father, Paul of Burgos, converted in 1391) actively wrote in defense of the *conversos*. He insisted that Israel would be redeemed by Jesus. With the plain ken, Alfonso pointed out that most Jews were not present at the Passion, and could not have participated in that blood curse.<sup>59</sup>

The conquest of Constantinople in 1453 launched movements among *conversos* in Valencia that expected the arrival of the true Messiah: the deep ken linked the cataclysmic event that had just happened to more cataclysmic events to come. These were echoed two decades later in Córdoba.<sup>60</sup>

In 1492, the Catholic Monarchs, Isabella and Ferdinand (1452–1516), expelled from their territories any Jews unwilling to convert, which caused further disruptions. That same year, Isaac Abrabanel (1437–1508), a Jewish scholar-financier in Portugal, attempted to pay protection money to allow the Jews to stay. Heartbroken by the expulsion, he wrote a series of apologetic works

56 Chazan, *The Jews*, 110.

57 Nirenberg, “Mass Conversion and Genealogical Mentalities,” 23–24.

58 For example, Paul of Burgos, *Scrutinium scripturarum*, 498–506.

59 Alfonso de Cartagena, *Defensorium Unitatis Christianae*, ed. Manuel Alonso (Madrid: Escuela de Estudios Hebraicos, 1943), 94, 166. See Netanyahu, *Origins of the Inquisition*, 281, 537, 548, 996.

60 Yitzhak Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, 2 vols. (Jewish Publication Society of America, 1961), II, 292–95; John Edwards, “Elijah and the Inquisition: Messianic Prophecy Among Conversos in Spain, C.1500,” *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 28 (1984): 79–94 (82).

in the 1490s. Abrabanel emphasized the importance of scripture over reason, and on the importance of messianism for Judaism—but Jesus was not that Messiah. Indeed, the Jews' rejection of Jesus proves that he was not the Messiah. In some verses of Isaiah (52:13–53:11), “my servant” referred to Israel, not the Messiah, so in the verse where its meaning was ambiguous, Abrabanel argued for a continuity of meaning—this too referred to Israel. “He had no form nor comeliness that we should look upon him. Nor beauty that we should delight in him” could not refer to Jesus, who was beautiful. In 1495, Jewish negotiators nearly secured a concession that unconverted Jews might remain in exchange for payment of a hefty fine—at the last moment a Christian official reminded Isabel of Judas betraying Jesus for silver, and the deal collapsed. In 1492, many Jews fled to Portugal, but in 1497, in order to marry Isabella of Aragon (1470–98), Ferdinand and Isabella's eldest daughter, the Portuguese king Manuel I (1469–1521) undertook an expulsion of his own: some Jews emigrated to colonies; others converted, taking ostentatiously Christian names like Cruz (cross), Trinidad (trinity), and Santos (saints). Ghettoization continued through the century, and by 1520 few Jews remained in western Europe.<sup>61</sup>

Conversion under such circumstances was, not unreasonably, considered suspect, and the “new” Christians faced continuing persecution, discrimination, and special requirements. The emphasis on blood continued. The *converso* Mosén Diego de Valera (1412–88), expert in chivalry, explained that non-Christians had their own aristocracies—that high social status would only increase upon conversion to Christianity—and the Jews had the extraordinary distinction of having been chosen for the Incarnation: God had made Jesus a Jew.<sup>62</sup>

## Envoi

This chapter has explored the boundaries, at a cultural and social level, between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. We looked at two cases of a growing societal saturation of one religion: Islam at the expense of Christianity in Anatolia, and Christianity at the expense of Judaism in Iberia. In these shifting contexts, two men exemplify the navigation strategies we have seen throughout the chapter.

The first, one Simón de Santa Clara (late fifteenth century), from Catalunya, lived in all three traditions. His father had compelled him to convert from

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61 Sarachek, *Doctrine of the Messiah*, 225, 230, 253–55; Jon Cowans, ed., *Early Modern Spain: A Documentary History* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 24–27.

62 Nirenberg, “Mass Conversion and Genealogical Mentalities,” 30–31; Martin de Córdoba, “Espejo de la verdadera nobleza,” in *Prosistas castellanos del siglo XV*, ed. Mario Penna (Madrid: Atlas, 1959), 102–05.

Judaism to Christianity around age twelve, and later in life he cannily suggested his willingness to be a Jewish-Christian-Muslim: “I have kept the Holy Law of Moses. I have kept the law of Jesus Christ, and if right now Saint Muhammad appeared, by God! I would keep all three; and if all were to end tomorrow, I would not fear God because I had walked in all three laws.”<sup>63</sup>

The second, Anselm Turmeda (1355–1423), moved between two traditions in ambiguous ways. Born in Majorca and memorizing most of the gospels as a child, Anselm went on to study at the University of Lerida (Catalonia), then on to Bologna, where he lived for ten years with the elderly priest Nicholas Martello, as his servant and student. One day, the priest was too ill to lecture, and the students waiting for him to arrive discussed Jesus’s mention of a paraclete who would come after him (Jn 14:26, cf. Qur’an 61:6). The student returned home, and told Martello of the conversation. The professor revealed that the paraclete mentioned by Jesus was actually the prophet Muhammad, and that Islam was the true religion. Asked his opinion about Christianity, the priest-professor replied, “My son, if the Christians had persisted in the original religion of Jesus, they would indeed belong to the religion of God, for the religion of Jesus and all of the Prophets is that of God.”<sup>64</sup> He urged the student to convert to Islam if he wanted to be saved, noting ruefully that he would himself if he were younger and stronger. The student sailed via Majorca and Sicily to Tunis, where he converted, to the shock of the Christian merchant expatriate community and the delight of the sultan, who made him an officer at the customs-house. Anselm became ‘Abd Allah al-Tarjuman (“the translator”), and wrote a *Tuhfat al-Arib fi al-Radd ‘ala Ahl al-Salib* [Autobiography and Retort to the Followers of the Cross] (1420). Following Islamic traditions, he argued that Jesus was not God, but just a human prophet, who did not die. The gospels were falsified. He carefully distinguished between the “Nazarene” religion (Christianity) and Islam, “the truly founded religion [*al-din al-qa’im*],” the religion that “abrogates all other religions [*al-nasikh* [...] *kull al-adyani*].” The “religion of Jesus” he identified with Islam.<sup>65</sup>

63 Encarnación Marín Padilla, “Relación judeoconversa durante la segunda mitad del siglo XV en Aragón: Enfermedades y muertes,” *Sefarad* 43 (1983): 251–344 (306–07).

64 ‘Abd Allāh al-Turjumān, “The Autobiography of Fray Anselmo Turmeda,” trans. Dwight F. Reynolds, in *Interpreting the Self: Autobiography in the Arabic Literary Tradition*, ed. Dwight F. Reynolds (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001), 194–201 (198).

65 تحفة الأريب في الرد على أهل الصليب (n.p., 1873), 2–3, 6–9.

## 7. Expansion of the Jesus Cult

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In the fifteenth century, Christianity had no monopoly on Jesus, nor Europe on Christianity, nor Europe on the world—which was mostly Asian. The Jesus cult had gone global long before the Late Traditional period, the first dramatic era of European exploration and proselytization. Jesus had not been born in Europe, after all, and his enthusiasts had spread his cult widely. In 1400, it blanketed most of Europe, ranged past the Sahara Desert, rose over the Ethiopian highlands, hugged the eastern coast of Africa, covered the Arabian Peninsula and the lands of Jesus's birth, stretched through the Indus Valley and the Upper Ganges Valley perhaps to Bengal, and sprinkled across Central Asia and China. Surveying the cult of Jesus from this global vantage point, we thus see a triangular shape bound by three points and the three edges that connect them: Greenland, around the African Sahel to Sofala, across the Indian Ocean towards Beijing, and beneath the Arctic Sea back to Greenland. Over fourteen hundred years, the Jesus cult girded one third of the circumference of the planet.

As our century begins, the Jesus cult was in motion—slowly pushing south in Africa, averaging a mile a year through the next century, but in most of its extremities was retreating. Beijing's Archbishop Giovanni da Montecorvino (1247–1328) died in 1328, and the new Chinese Ming emperor expelled Christians in 1369. In Greenland, Álfur of Garðar, that see's last resident bishop, died in 1378: although Latin Christendom's three papal lines were appointing successors to him, none of those ever bothered to actually go to Greenland. Even so far away, the cult survived these reverses, but faded, and became forgotten, or half forgotten.

The four Late Traditional centuries have long been seen as a period of Christian expansion, heroic or villainous depending on one's perspective. Islamic expansion then was also substantial, although it paled in comparison with this Christian growth and with its own growth in previous centuries.

The impressive expansion of both subcults conceals significant regional differences. This table shows the spread of the Jesus cult from 1400 to 1800.<sup>1</sup>

| REGIONAL POPULATIONS IN THE JESUS CULT |                 | 1400                | 1800 |     |
|--|-----------------|---------------------|------|-----|
| PLOUGHLANDS                            | low → low       | Sinic Core          | 2%   | 10% |
|  | low/med. → med. | between the Cores   | 10%  | 45% |
|  |                 | Indic Core          | 25%  | 60% |
|  | high → high     | Near West Periphery | 95%  | 99% |
|  |                 | Far West Periphery  | 95%  | 99% |
| BEYOND THE PLOUGHLANDS                 | low → high      | Asian Russia        | 10%  | 80% |
|  |                 | Latin America       | 0%   | 80% |
|  | low → med       | North America       | 0%   | 45% |
|  |                 | Sub-Saharan Africa  | 15%  | 45% |

Table 7.1 Jesus Cult Expansion 1400 to 1800.

Essentially, we see three geographical patterns: in the Ploughlands, the Core (1) began with a low level of regional population in the Jesus cult, and increased modestly, more in the Indic than the Sinic lobe. The Ploughlands' periphery (2), the Near and Far West, was and remained the centre of the Jesus cult, and here we see mostly consolidation. In 1400, Islam, for example, had already spread thoroughly through the greater Near West, with beachheads across Asia and Africa. The most dramatic changes occurred beyond the Ploughlands (3), where regions of no or low Jesus exposure transformed rapidly; by 1800, some (Latin America, Siberia) had become heavily focused on Jesus while others (North America, Sub-Saharan Africa) were halfway there.

We can zoom in further, to look at the growth of the Jesus cult in the long fifteenth century taken up in this volume (see Fig. 7.1). This map marks the borders of the Jesus cult at 1400 (in red) and at 1520 (in blue).

1 These, my rough estimates, should be taken cautiously, as here one uncertainty (overall population numbers) compounds another (religious demographics), all undermined by blurriness of what counts as being "in" the Jesus cult. Encouragingly, my guesstimates are compatible with those in the *World Christian Encyclopedia*, ed. David B. Barrett (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1982), 796.



Fig. 7.1 Expansion of the Jesus Cult, Taf Richards, Arcane Atlas Cartography (@Arcane\_Atlas), CC BY-NC.

The map reveals four zones of growth: from east to west, they are (1) the Asian Core's southeastern frontier, between the two Core lobes, (2) the Far West's northern frontier, (3) central Africa's western seaboard, and (4) the Americas' eastern seaboard. This chapter looks at the borders and expansion of the Jesus cult. In contrast to chapters focused on the depth and intensiveness of the cult, this one focuses on its breadth and extensiveness, mostly on a societal level.

The most striking leitmotif in this chapter is the importance, for almost all parties, Christian and not, of the cross. I refer to this with the purposefully obnoxious name "CrossTech 3.0." This is the technology of the cross, a technology both useful and valuable. It might be helpful to think of religion as a technology rather than as something more ethereal. A historian of Judaism once told me that the Torah was about as spiritual as California's Vehicle Code. Our modern world discounts religion and worships technology, and so it makes sense to use the language of our values to colour the language we use to refer to the Late



Traditionals' values.<sup>2</sup> Not meant to be precise, "3.0" suggests its evolution over the centuries. Indigenous peoples and Christians alike shared a sense that the Christians had a CrossTech superior to the Indigenous ones, an updated version with enhanced functionalities. The core technology was oriented towards the deep ken in that it did not change with time, and clearly worked through the principle of resonance—between the cross someone carved in the fifteenth century and the cross Jesus died on in the first. The "user interface," in contrast, was oriented towards the plain ken, and looked different in different places and times. Unfortunately, beyond a sense of its military potential, we have relatively few details about crosses' specific powers; people pursued, honoured, and feared CrossTech, but rarely explained their motivations (see Chapter 8).

Jesus, and especially his CrossTech, accompanied the Portuguese Empire, the polity most linked to the cult's expansion. In 1510, Goa fell to the Portuguese, Malacca in 1511, Hormuz in 1515. The Portuguese were in Ayutthaya in 1511, where they supplied firearms to help the Thais defeat the Burmese in 1520. The Order of Christ's cross blessed the sails of the Portuguese ships. On his voyage to South Asia, Vasco da Gama (ca. 1469–1524) had a silk banner with that same cross. Similarly, Pedro Álvares Cabral (1468–1520) displayed a flag bearing the cross of the Order; in 1500, he discovered what we call Brazil—he called it, naturally, "Terra de Santa Cruz" [Land of the Holy Cross].<sup>3</sup> A banner "like" the ones with the Order of Christ crosses was given to Ethiopia's king as a token of friendship in 1520.<sup>4</sup> In Morocco, at Agadir, in 1505, the Portuguese constructed a trading factory and fortress complex called "Santa Cruz do Cabo de Aguer." In 1452, the Portuguese Empire was accumulating enough gold to allow for the printing of gold "cruzado" coins, so named for the cross engraved on them. The cruzados from the period of Kings Manuel I (1469–1521, rl. 1495–1521) and John III (1502–57, rl. 1521–57) encircled their crosses with the slogan "in hoc signo vinces" [by this sign you will conquer], a reference to Constantine, the first Christian emperor. From 1499 to 1504, Portugal also minted silver *índios* to facilitate trade with India, with a cross and the same phrase.<sup>5</sup>

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2 Today, a mainstream sees much of law and religion as oppressive and vacuous, in part because of the growth of the size/power/depth of states, which empowered law and marginalized religion. The story of that state growth is happening in this chapter.

3 Matthew H. Voss, "'In this sign you shall conquer': The Cross of the Order of Christ in Sixteenth-Century Portuguese Cartography," *Terrae Incognitae* 39 (2007): 24–36, <https://doi.org/10.1179/008228807790802658>

4 João de Barros, *Da Asia*, 24 vols. (Lisbon: Na Regina Officina Typografica, 1777–78), I, 11, 234; V, 347, 357–67, 376–78, 382–86, 591.

5 Damião de Góis, *Crónica do Felicíssimo Rei D. Manuel*, ed. J. M. Teixeira de Carvalho and David Lopes, 4 vols. (Coimbra: Imprensa da universidade, 1926), IV, 211. Only two are extant, one in Brazil's Museu Histórico Nacional and the other

This is less a story about negotiation than about how to get the most powerful new technology. There could be negotiation about the terms and conditions of use, but “negotiating religion” would be like my insisting my new laptop computer also be a microwave oven. That works if religion is just constructed meaning, but not if it is technology and you are hungry. The Indigenous peoples lived within a polytropic world. They had all their traditional technologies, and now had an updated CrossTech 3.0 to add to their toolbox.

This book understands the Jesus cult broadly, including any kind of invoking Jesus, regardless of formal “religious” identity. Participation in the Jesus cult, then, occurred along a continuum, from one extreme of no explicit knowledge of Jesus, to occasional and then frequent invocation of Jesus, finally to an exclusive loyalty to Jesus—and related figures such as Yahweh and Mary—a loyalty that increasingly conforms to normative expectations of Islam or Christianity. Even expectations of conformity were themselves on a continuum, from the relatively lax situation in Africa to the relatively strict expectations in the Americas.<sup>6</sup> Joining this Jesus cult, then, need not be emotional or intellectual or even Jesus-centric. Only in later centuries did the emotional connection to Jesus appear as necessary or even desirable, with few exceptions such as Jesus’s highly devoted mystical wives (see Chapter 20).

## The Asian Core’s Southeastern Frontier

Between the two lobes of the Core, the Natuna Sea had long been a well-trafficked and commercially critical node (see Fig. 7.2). This region saw an increased Islamicization in this period, a piecemeal expansion through the islands of what would become Indonesia, today the country with the most Muslims. Islam expanded through Sufi missionaries and through Muslim merchants marrying into local social elites; they came from Arabia, from South Asia, and, most prominently on Sulu, from China. On the mainland’s coast, Pegu had Muslims by the fifteenth century, and Arakan and Taungoo soon would.<sup>7</sup>

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recovered from the Esmeralda shipwreck. David L. Mearns, David Parham, and Bruno Frohlich, “A Portuguese East Indiaman from the 1502–1503 Fleet of Vasco da Gama off Al Hallaniyah Island, Oman,” *International Journal of Nautical Archaeology* 45 (2016): 331–51, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1095-9270.12175>. Cross desecration also marked the contraction of the Christian subcult: Muslims conquering Christian Anatolia removed the horizontal bars from crosses to negate their power. F. W. Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam under the Sultans*, ed. Margaret M. Hasluck, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1929), I, 30.

6 See John Thornton, “The Development of an African Catholic Church in the Kingdom of Kongo, 1491–1750,” *Journal of African History* 25 (1983): 147–67.

7 André Wink, *Al-Hind: The Making of the Indo-Islamic World*, 3 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2004), III, 116–17, 212–23.



Fig. 7.2 Expansion in Southeast Asia, Taf Richards, Arcane Atlas Cartography (@Arcane\_Atlas), CC BY-NC.

Around 1400, the exiled polytropic prince Parameswara of Palembang (1344–ca. 1414) settled with his retinue at Malacca. After overcoming pirates that preyed on ships forced by geography through the Malacca straits, either he or his son Iskander Shah (d. 1424) (drawing deep-ken power from his claimed descent from Alexander the Great) married the daughter of the Muslim king of Pasai, and in 1414 formally converted to Islam.<sup>8</sup> That controversial conversion, whatever it entailed for the Prince’s personal beliefs, triggered court fights between the new Muslims and the local Hindu-Buddhists. Eventually, the Muslims triumphed with a palace coup in the 1440s, which solidified Islam at court. It then spread, but slowly and incompletely, through the population. Visiting Malacca in 1462, Shihab al-Din Ahmad Ibn Majid (ca. 1432–1500) sniffed that “They have no culture at all... You do not know whether they are Muslims or not.”<sup>9</sup> Malacca became a major port, with a large Chinese merchant

8 Parameswara and Iskander may in fact be the same person. Donald B. Freeman, *The Straits of Malacca: Gateway or Gauntlet?* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s UP, 2003), 83–86, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780773570870>; Jennifer Shutek, “The Diffusion of Islam in the Strait of Malacca Region” (unpublished manuscript, 11 April 2011); Christopher H. Wake, “Malacca’s Early Kings and the Reception of Islam,” *Journal of Southeast Asian History* 5 (1964): 104–28.

9 Quoted in Luis Filipe Ferreira Reis Thomaz, “The Malay Sultanate of Melaka,” in *Southeast Asia in the Early Modern Era: Trade, Power, and Belief*, ed. Anthony Reid (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1993), 69–90 (79), <https://doi.org/10.7591/9781501732171-007>

community amidst a dazzlingly diverse population. Even the local parrots, it was said, were polyglots.<sup>10</sup>

## The Far West's Northern Frontier

Here the cold winters and vast forests of the taiga had for centuries discouraged settlers with ploughs (see Fig. 7.3). In this period, Islam advanced slowly from the northern frontier of the Near West, but the more important expansions were Christian. Finally, the Lithuanians, known as the last pagan people of Europe, converted to Christianity. Beyond them lived Finno-Ugric speakers, including the Sámi and the Komi, who converted later and more slowly. Perhaps because they were mostly hunters beyond the Ploughland, their later conversions have not trumped the Lithuanians' reputation as Europe's last polytropic holdouts. This section considers in turn the Lithuanians, the Sámi, and the Komi.

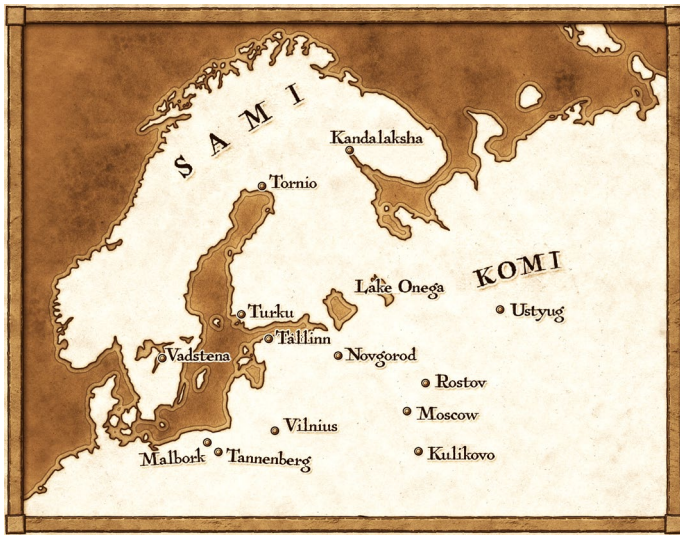


Fig. 7.3 Expansion in the North, Taf Richards, Arcane Atlas Cartography (@Arcane\_Atlas), CC BY-NC.

## Lithuanians

Orthodox Christianity had come to these lands during the days of Kievan Rus' (ca. 880–1240), but, due to internal and external pressures, Kievan Rus'

10 David Abulafia, *The Discovery of Mankind: Atlantic Encounters in the Age of Columbus* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2008), 25–26.

disintegrated into many states, of Ukrainians, of Belarussians, and of “Great” Russians. As the Mongols withdrew, Lithuania became a powerful state, with its borders reaching down to the Black Sea. The polytropic Lithuanian rulers tolerated their Christian subjects, who, beyond a small Catholic social elite, were mostly Orthodox. Christians in Lithuania and Muscovy competed for the honour of hosting the metropolitan Bishop of Kiev and all Rus’. Often this competition was financial: the fourteenth century saw Lithuania sending funds to Athos and Muscovy sending funds to Constantinople to, for example, repair the Hagia Sophia.<sup>11</sup> Byzantium prized Lithuanian power but hesitated about their polytropic prince and their occasional execution of Christians, such as the “Vilnius martyrs” (d. 1377), killed for refusing to eat meat during Lent.

As our period began, polytropism was in decline in this religiously pluralistic Lithuania. Defeat by Christian armies had likely triggered a crisis of confidence in the old ways. Many among the Lithuanian elite’s kin and allies, and most of their subjects, were already Christian. In this transition period, an oath once considered binding might now be safely, if politics allowed, ignored. Grand Duke Kęstutis (ca. 1297–1382), of the penultimate polytropic generation, was still buried with his horses and falcons, but of the last generation of pre-Christian rulers, no records remain suggesting they had polytropic beliefs or practices. The last polytropic rulers were perhaps only “culturally pagan,” like those people identifying as “culturally Catholic” today.<sup>12</sup>

Meanwhile, the Teutonic Knights had built at Malbork a copy of the Jerusalem Hospital, updated into a kind of luxury fortress. From there, they launched crusades against the Lithuanians. The years 1390 and 1392 saw Henry Bolingbroke, the future Henry IV of England (1367–1413, r. 1399–1413), aiding the Teutonic Knights in assaulting the Lithuanian capital of Vilnius. He kidnapped local non-Christian children whom he had baptized and brought into his entourage; two of those returned with him to England.<sup>13</sup>

Faced with such threats, Jogaila, Grand Duke of Lithuania (1377–92), weighed his options. Conversion to Orthodoxy would match the religion of the majority of his subjects. Conversion to Catholicism would stop the advance of the Catholic Teutonic Knights. At the same time Jogaila was looking for a way to halt the Knights, the Poles were looking for a husband for their eleven-year-old

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11 Georges Castellan, *History of the Balkans: From Mohammad the Conqueror to Stalin* (New York: Columbia UP, 1992), 59; Donald Ostrowski, *Muscovy and the Mongol: Cross-Cultural Influences on the Steppe Frontier* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1998), 20–22.

12 Darius Baronas and Stephen Christopher Rowell, *Conversion of Lithuania: From Pagan Barbarians to Late Medieval Christians* (Vilnius: Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore, 2015), 231–34, 245.

13 Ian Mortimer, *The Fears of Henry IV* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2007), 96–97.

Queen Jadwiga (1373/74–99). Each quest finds its solution in the other. In the spring of 1386, Jogaila was baptized as a Catholic, married to Jadwiga, and crowned king, as Władysław II Jagiełło. This began a close alliance between Lithuania and Poland, with a vast combined territory, that would hold for centuries. The conversion gave the new king Władysław access to modern CrossTech, to which he cultivated a special devotion. He adopted as a personal sign the double cross, which would later enter the Grand Duchy's coat of arms, and remains in use in Lithuania today.<sup>14</sup>

The new king's cousin Vytautas (ca. 1350–1430), son of Kęstutis, rebelled, with the assistance of the enemy Teutonic Knights, and, in 1392, became the new Grand Duke of Lithuania, with Władysław the nominal overlord as a "Supreme Duke." Vytautas had been baptized in both the Catholic and Orthodox subcults at opportune times.<sup>15</sup> A theologian further west linked Vytautas to a prophecy foretelling the rule of the "Son of Man," a Jesus title from the gospels (see Chapter 19).

Władysław now needed to achieve a comprehensive conversion of his polytropic and Orthodox subjects to Catholic Christianity. The Lithuanian aristocracy had converted with him, but not the Ruthenians. A variety of tools and techniques were available for the missionary enterprise. The king brought in Polish clergy to do the groundwork. The first Bishop of Vilnius, Andrzej Jastrzębiec (d. 1398), was given an annual supply of two hundred silver marks and ten barrels of honey to underwrite the costs of evangelization. At least by 1398, the Vilnius Cathedral had a relic of the holy cross. The Lithuanian grand dukes would also support friars' missions further east, among the Muslims.<sup>16</sup>

A key tool for the promotion of the newly arrived Catholic Church, here as elsewhere, was the indulgence. A 1450 papal proclamation allowed Lithuanians unable to reach Rome to partake in the jubilee indulgence: you need only pay half of what you would have spent on the journey to Rome, and then visit the Vilnius Cathedral for three days instead. The promised uses of the collected funds reveals a region on the subcult's frontier: 50% went to fight the Muslims, 25% for dowries for young women converted to Catholicism, and 25% to Rome.<sup>17</sup>

The process was slow and imperfect. In 1436, Bishop Matthias of Vilnius (ca. 1370–1453) was still baptizing "various infidels." In 1503, Church authorities

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14 Baronas and Rowell, *Conversion of Lithuania*, 283.

15 *Ibid.*, 248.

16 Jan Fijałek and Władysław Semkowicz, ed., *Kodeks dyplomatyczny katedry i diecezji wileńskiej*, 3 vols. (Krakow: Polska Akademia Umiejętności, 1932–48), I, 51–52, 54–59; Irena Sułkowska-Kuraś and Stanislaus Kuraś, ed., *Bullarium Poloniae*, 7 vols. (Rome: Catholic University of Lublin, 1995), V, 285.

17 Augustin Theiner, ed., *Vetera monumenta Poloniae et Lithuaniae gentiumque finitimarum historiam illustrantia*, 2 vols. (Rome: Vatican, 1861), II, 80–81.

hesitated about holding a mass outdoors, for fear it might be mistaken for a polytropic ceremony. Some of the old holy polytropic forests were actively felled by energetic missionaries, but others were simply abandoned. In hidden, out-of-the-way places some holy vipers, holy fires, and holy woods survived.<sup>18</sup>

The relationship between the Catholic rulers and those subjects remaining Orthodox tended to be flexible. In 1404, King Władysław sought papal permission to attend mass even if “schismatics” (probably the Orthodox) were present; apparently, a number of non-Catholics never converted but were keen, polytropically, to take advantage of some aspects of the Catholic mass. In 1418, Vytautas asked for the same permission to attend mass with “gentiles, schismatics, and infidels,” explicitly for evangelical purposes.<sup>19</sup> Vytautas explained to his Orthodox subjects that his being Catholic made him objective in Orthodox affairs, and that his selfless interference to improve the Orthodox Church hierarchy ran against his own material interests.<sup>20</sup>

Conversion brought some thorough-going social changes. With the arrival of the Jesus cult, wine, schools, writing, and capital punishment became more common and prominent in Lithuanian society. By 1500, the Vilnius diocese had at least 139 churches. To most eyes, Lithuania was almost as Christianized as anywhere else in Christendom.<sup>21</sup>

The hope that the Catholic Knights would not attack the newly Catholic Lithuanians proved fleeting. With the pretense of religious crusade belied—partially, as they could still question the quality of the Lithuanians’ Catholicism—the Knights became merely aggressive bad neighbours, and expanded their offensives to include the Poles as well. In 1410, at the battle of Tannenberg, the Polish-Lithuanians decisively defeated the Knights, who nonetheless antagonized the Lithuanians until 1422, and the Poles even longer.

In the end, how Christian were the Lithuanians? Some examples suggest the rulers’ new nominal belief did not interfere with their old polytropic common sense: Mindaugas of Lithuania (ca. 1203–63) was baptized, but, as the Galician Chronicler remembers, “When Mindaugas rode out into the field, and a hare ran across his path, then he would not go into the grove, nor dared he break a twig. He made sacrifices to his god, burnt corpses and conducted pagan rites in public.” The standards for the region were low, and the Lithuanians often looked good, in Catholic eyes, only compared to their neighbours. Friars in Tallinn (in

18 Fijałek and Semkowicz, ed., *Kodeks dyplomatyczny*, 160, 576–79. See Baronas and Rowell, *Conversion of Lithuania*, 261–62.

19 Irena Sułkowska-Kuraś, Stanislaus Kuraś, and Hubertus Wajs, ed., *Bullarium Poloniae*, 6 vols. (Rome: Catholic University of Lublin, 1992), IV, 60 (no. 327, 27 August 1418).

20 Baronas and Rowell, *Conversion of Lithuania*, 322.

21 *Ibid.*, x, 297–99, 306, 356, 522.

Estonia) in the 1420s complained about corpses hanging from church doors: if a family did not, or could not, pay the burial fee, the priest would dig up the body and display it to shame the family. Władysław and Vytautas praised their own efforts to baptize and convert the Samogitian Lithuanians even while the indigenous Prussians, despite being ruled by Teutonic Knights for two centuries, were barely Christian. Bridget of Sweden (ca. 1303–73) agreed that the Knights preferred territorial expansion to proselytism, and noted that converts would have been less willing soldiers.<sup>22</sup>

### Sámi

In 1400, Sweden and Norway had no clear borders to the north, but their rulers showed little interest in converting their neighbours the Sámi, known historically as the Lapps. From the thirteenth century, the Norwegians had made some missionary attempts, with very partial success, and, in 1400, there was a nominally Christian minority. The cult of Jesus followed lifestyle and geography: sedentary Sámi along the coast converted much more frequently than the hunters, fishers, and pastoralists in the forested, mountainous regions inland and far north. Those religious conversions of the sedentary often came with an ethnic conversion from a Sámi identity, to one Swedish or Norwegian.<sup>23</sup>

Following baptisms in 1345 at Tornio, the northernmost point of the Gulf of Bothnia, in 1389 the visionary Sámi convert Margareta travelled south to the Bridgettine abbey Vadstena to ask the new Queen Margaret I (1353–1412), who was perhaps her namesake, to send a missionary. Forty years later the crown finally dispatched a missionary, named Toste, who erected a number of chapels in the far north. Further east, the Novgorod missionary Lazar Muromsky (1286–1391) established two monasteries on the eastern shore of Lake Onega, where he died. In the 1520s, Sámi at Kandalaksha Bay, the northernmost arm of the White Sea, were converted. The Sámi made use of pendant crosses made of pewter, the appearance of which suggested an artistic origin in Russia. Their power might have resonated with an indigenous CrossTech culture, or perhaps the imported, updated CrossTech 3.0 proved so powerful as to be immediately integrated into Sámi polytropic sacrifices.<sup>24</sup>

22 Eric Christiansen, *The Northern Crusades: The Baltic and the Catholic Frontier* (London: Macmillan, 1980), 137, 160, 204–05, 236.

23 Jean-Marie Maillefer, "Notes sur l'Église et les Lapons au moyen âge," *Revue du Nord* 64 (1982): 751–57.

24 Neil Kent, *The Sámi Peoples of the North* (London: Hurst, 2014), 90–95; Denis Kuzmin, "The Inhabitation of Karelia in the First Millennium AD in the Light of Linguistics," in *Fibula, Fabula, Fact: The Viking Age in Finland*, ed. Joonas Ahola, Frog, and Clive Tolley (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2014), 269–95 (273);



## Komi

The Komi, also called Zyrians and Permyaks, lived to the north of the Russians. In Old Perm, the town of Ustyug straddled the frontier between the Komi and the Russians, who mostly came from Novgorod, a city which enjoyed at least a theoretical sovereignty here. Ustyug was a market town, where the hunter Komi could sell dismembered animal carcasses to the Russians. Here, Stephen of Perm (ca. 1340–96) was born. After going south to train in a Rostov monastery, Stephen returned north to his home, and went alone into the woods to preach to the Komi. Historians presume, based on his birthplace, that his fluency in Komi matched his skill in Russian and in Greek.

Some converted quickly, but many Komi resisted. Violent attempts to beat the missionary, to burn him, and to shoot him all failed. Perhaps they were half-hearted feints, but the Komi themselves understood that Stephen had a powerful defensive mechanism: non-harm. Stephen “has a bad custom” (обычай) in that “he will not start a fight.” Indeed, “should he have dared to start a fight we would have torn him to pieces a long time ago... But as he has patience we do not know what we can do to him.” Indeed, Stephen “spoke no evil word to any of us, and he neither turned away from us, nor fought us, but suffered everything gladly.”

The polytropic resisters decided to try a more intellectual strategy, led by a powerful sorcerer named Pam. Stephen and Pam began a great debate, starting in the morning and concluding around dawn the following day, that struggled for the destiny of the Komi. Pam’s arguments were several and persuasive. One god was inferior to “many” gods, especially gods who “give us game, all that is in the waters, and in the air, in swamps and forests—squirrels or sables, martens or lynxes and other game,” the body parts of which were sent even to Lithuania and to Constantinople. Furthermore, polytropic beliefs allowed the Komi to outperform Christians at bear hunting: we could defeat a bear in single combat, while a hundred Christians, “shamefully,” might not be able to hunt a single bear. Finally, the multiplicity of gods served as a long-distance communication infrastructure: “We quickly learn all news; whatever happens in a far-off country, in a foreign town [...] the complete news of it reaches us at the same hour [...] for we have many gods aiding us.”

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Inga-Maria Mulk and Tim Bayliss-Smith, “Colonisation, Sami Sacred Sites and Religious Syncretism, ca. AD 500–1800,” in *The Sound of Silence: Indigenous Perspectives on the Historical Archaeology of Colonialism*, ed. Tiina Äikäs and Anna-Kaisa Salmi (New York: Berghahn, 2019), 39–70, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1850hr9.6>

Realizing he could not counter these arguments with contrary evidence, Stephen decided to show, not tell, with a crude but dramatic strategy. He dared Pam to join him in walking through a flaming hut and then diving into an icy river. Pam, knowing he was not immune to fire and ice (“I have not acquired this [skill] from my father”), declined, admitted defeat, and asked to convert. Stephen refused for some reason, and Pam fled into the forest, “like a stag.”

Now largely unopposed, Stephen travelled to Moscow to bring back a bishop, but there the metropolitan decided that the best available bishop would be Stephen himself. In 1383, the new bishop returned to Perm to consolidate the Christianization of the Komi. A decade earlier, Stephen had created an alphabet for their language, and soon translated both the Book of Hours and the gospels into it. Thus, Komi became only the second Uralic language, after Hungarian, with a substantial written record. Stephen died in Moscow in 1396.

By the 1430s, the region felt an increased Russian—especially from Muscovy—industrial and military presence, which may have encouraged the Duke of Great Perm to convert, sometime before 1470, taking the Christian name “Mikhail.” Novgorod, too, recognized the shift in power, and surrendered its suzerainty in 1471. Within a year, Grand Duke Ivan III of Muscovy (1440–1505) attacked Great Perm, captured Mikhail, whose conversion proved no defence, and made him a vassal. His son and successor would be replaced by a governor answering to Moscow. Far less accepting of the vernacular than Stephen had been, the Russians outlawed the Komi liturgy: it was essentially a pagan language, they felt, so any liturgy said in it was necessarily a pagan liturgy. Their deep ken linked the effectiveness of the ritual to consonance with the language used. Still, the Komi liturgy—and indeed many Komi polytropic practices—continued quietly into the eighteenth century.<sup>25</sup>

## Central Africa’s Western Seaboard

The African frontier begins with the pastoral areas in the Saharan desert, turns into the hand-cultivated Congo Valley, and ends in the Kalahari Desert of the hunter-gatherers (see Fig. 7.4). With Muslim traders crossing the Sahara Desert and expanding down the east coast of Africa, Islam made a haphazard expansion down the African savannah, spread through a variety of agents, including

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25 Dmitrij Čiževskij, *History of Russian Literature: From the Eleventh Century to the End of the Baroque* (The Hague: Mouton and Co., 1971), 167–78; Jukka Korpela, “Stefan von Perm’, Heiliger Täufer im politischen Kontext,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 49 (2001): 481–99; Rein Taagepera, *The Finno-Ugric Republics and the Russian State* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 299–302; Serge A. Zenkovsky, ed., *Medieval Russia’s Epics* (New York: Dutton, 1974), 259–62, 283–84.

merchants, teachers, and settlers, and through a variety of Sufi, teacher-student, and mercantile networks. The wealthy, powerful Mali Empire—a visit of its ruler to Egypt had collapsed the price of gold there—was in slow decline, and Islam, never deeply rooted, met a mixed fate. Islam was strongest, and was the majority religion, in Takrur throughout our period. The Jolof Kingdom, part of the Mali breakup, continued to Islamicize throughout the fifteenth century.<sup>26</sup>



Fig. 7.4 Expansion in Africa, Taf Richards, Arcane Atlas Cartography (@Arcane\_Atlas), CC BY-NC.

The more dramatic expansion of the Jesus cult in Africa came with Christianity and the Portuguese Empire. Prince Henry (1394–1460) had captured the city of

26 Nehemia Levtzion, “Islam in the Bilad al-Sudan to 1800,” in *History of Islam in Africa*, ed. Nehemia Levtzion and Randall L. Pouwels (Athens: Ohio UP, 2000), 73–101; David Robinson, *Muslim Societies in African History* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2004), 27–59, <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511811746>; Jay Spaulding, “Precolonial Islam in the Eastern Sudan,” in *History of Islam*, ed. Levtzion and Pouwels, 126–38; Spencer Trimingham, *History of Islam in West Africa* (New York: Oxford UP, 1962), 34–140; Ivor Wilks, “The Juula and the Expansion of Islam into the Forest,” in *History of Islam*, ed. Levtzion and Pouwels, 102–25.

Ceuta from the Muslims in 1415, and, two years later, the pope appointed him Grand Master of the Order of the Knights of Christ. Soon, Henry began financing the exploration of the African coast, as well as the technological advancements in shipbuilding that expanded the explorers' range. His ships first reached the island of Madeira in 1418, the Cape Verde islands in 1445, and, by the 1450s, the African mainland along the Gulf of Guinea. In 1483, they settled, with slaves, at São Tomé. As they mapped the continent's coast down to the Cape, the Portuguese erected crosses, initially made of wood but later of stone, which had navigational, legal, and subtle deep-ken uses. Colonists followed closely behind.<sup>27</sup>

In the 1440s, the Portuguese initiated a new strategy for spreading Christianity. They kidnapped locals, and brought them back to Portugal to be sold as slaves. Those Africans might, some Church officials hoped, be trained in Christianity and returned home to spread the Gospel. Some did become Christians, and some of those became free. One man, born ca. 1480, from the Kingdom of Kongo went to Portugal, converted to Christianity, taking the name Juan Garrido, before reaching Hispaniola (ca. 1502), and then joining Hernán Cortés (1485–1547) in the invasion of Mexico. There, around 1521–23, Garrido built a chapel and a Chinampa garden, where he planted three seeds of wheat—for the first time in the Americas—and probably started a small vineyard. Local availability of bread and wine supported the celebration of the mass.<sup>28</sup>

In 1482, the Portuguese built a fort at Elmina, their first in the tropics. An outdoor mass was held immediately upon going ashore, to properly mark the beginning of their establishment. The local chief refused baptism, however, and the Portuguese refused to leave. After several setbacks, they succeeded in building a chapel, São Jorge da Mina, so that daily masses could be said for the soul of Prince Henry, who had died in 1460.<sup>29</sup>

Material evidence of the Jesus cult in Africa can be hard to read, although visually powerful. Sapi artisans, in present-day Sierra Leone, carved containers from elephant ivory, juxtaposing Jesus representations and European heraldic symbols with African themes, animals, and designs. Scholars refer to these creations as "saltcellars," although who used them, and how, remains obscure. This example, featuring a Madonna and Child atop a vessel ornamented with snakes and the Order of Christ's cross, is thought to be a cyborium for

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27 A. R. Disney, *A History of Portugal and the Portuguese Empire*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2009), II, 1–118.

28 Peter Gerhard, "A Black Conquistador in Mexico," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 58 (1978): 451–59; Matthew Restall, "Black Conquistadors: Armed Africans in Early Spanish America," *The Americas* 57 (2000): 171–205 (177), <https://doi.org/10.1353/tam.2000.0015>

29 Rui de Pina, *Crónica de el-rey D. João II*, ed. Alberto Martins de Carvalho (Coimbra: Atlântida, 1950), 8–9.

holding consecrated Eucharistic hosts (see Fig. 7.5). Some ivory pyxes, used to transport the hosts, feature distinctive textured renderings of scenes from Jesus's life (see Fig. 7.6).<sup>30</sup>



Fig. 7.5 Salt Cellar with Madonna and Child (ca. 1490–1520), British Museum, London, © Trustees of the British Museum, [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/E\\_Af1981-35-1-a-b](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/E_Af1981-35-1-a-b)

30 Ezio Bassani and William B. Fagg, *Africa and the Renaissance: Art in Ivory* (New York: Center for African Art, 1988); Rabia Gregory, "Black as a Coconut and White as a Tusk: African Materials and European Displays of Christ Before Columbus," *Journal of African Religions* 2 (2014): 395–408; Frederick John Lamp, "Ivory and Stone: Direct Connections between Sculptural Media along the Coast of Sierra Leone, 15<sup>th</sup>–16<sup>th</sup> Centuries," *Afrique: Archéologie & Arts* 16 (2020) 11–42, <https://doi.org/10.4000/aaa.2753>; Mario Pereira, "African Art at the Portuguese Court, c. 1450–1521" (PhD thesis, Brown University, 2010). The Smithsonian's oliphant ([https://www.si.edu/object/hunting-horn:nmafa\\_2005-6-9](https://www.si.edu/object/hunting-horn:nmafa_2005-6-9)) has been described (Bassani and Fagg, *Africa*, 97) as featuring Jesus as the Good Shepherd, but I propose that that figure is just a hunter. The Indo-Portuguese Bom Pastor sculptures, possibly taking a thoughtful pose from the Buddha, came later.



Fig. 7.6 Ivory Pyx with Scenes from the Passion of Christ (ca. 1490–1530), Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, CC0 1.0, <https://art.thewalters.org/detail/13267/ivory-pyx-with-scenes-from-the-passion-of-christ/>

## Kingdom of Kongo

For the rest of the 1480s, the Portuguese explored the lower Congo River, and thus made contact with the Kingdom of Kongo. In 1483, they arrived in its large capital city, M'banza-Kongo. This allowed for some exchange of people, so that Portuguese were stationed in Kongo, and Kongolese in Portugal. The *mwene* [lord] of Soyo, the coastal province stretching some hundred kilometres inland, was baptized, a celebration accented with a bonfire of polytropic objects, just fourteen years before the bonfire of the vanities in Savonarola's Florence (see Chapter 5). King Nzinga a Nkuwu (ca. 1440–1509, rl. 1470–1509) was baptized as João I (3 May 1491), along with members of his court including his wife Eleonora and son Afonso, in a rushed ceremony as he departed to put down a rebellion upriver.<sup>31</sup>

João's baptismal presents from the Portuguese were handy in such dangerous circumstances: a CrossTech banner that had been previously used in the crusades against the Muslims, and a promise that it would guarantee him victory in battle. Much of traditional African beliefs ("Elaborate rituals and offerings, belief in magic and divination, ancestor worship, votive offerings and sacrifices, and the adjuration of gods to deal with real-world problems")

31 António Brásio, ed., *Monumenta Missionaria Africana, África Ocidental*, 15 vols. (Lisbon: Agência Geral do Ultramar, 1952), I, 121–29.

found ready parallels in Catholicism. Africans in Benin had even included the cross as a powerful divine symbol—and that same African-become-Christian CrossTech would be transported across the Atlantic to be a part of voodoo in Haiti. CrossTech were common also in Kongo indigenous art, pre-dating the known arrival of Christianity.<sup>32</sup>

One courtier baptized with João a few days later discovered a mysterious sculpture: a two-palm-high cross skilfully carved, appearing to have been “worked as if with great industry” into a black stone of a material not local to Kongo. The report to the king compared this “holy thing of stone never seen before” with “that which the friars had when we became Christians and they called the Cross.” The king consulted his Portuguese advisers, who declared it a sign of the “grace and salvation which God sent to you and your kingdom,” and urged him to give “infinite thanks.” The cross was formally escorted into the new church, called the Holy Saviour (São Salvador).<sup>33</sup>

Mvemba a Nzinga, who was João’s son and the governor of Nsundi, had also been baptized, as Afonso, in 1491. Baptismal names were chosen for their consonant deep-ken power: the Soyo lord, for example, was a duke and the queen’s brother; he therefore selected “Manuel” as his Christian name, as he understood that there was a Portuguese duke, brother to the queen, with that name.<sup>34</sup>

Eventually, João calculated that the benefits of Christianity were not sufficient to compensate for the losses, which he might not have fully understood at the time of conversion: the end of polygamy cost him a powerful political and social tool, and the end of fetishes—they had been burned—left his peoples defenceless against witchcraft and drought. He appears to have apostatized, or at least lost his enthusiasm for Christianity.

The more pious Prince Afonso reported to the Portuguese king that his father, João, had wanted him killed, ostensibly as a kind of experiment to see whether Yahweh would save him. Afonso gave thanks for this opportunity to die as a martyr “for the love of Our Lord.” After João himself died in 1507, Afonso

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32 João de Barros, *Da Ásia*, in *Monumenta Missionaria*, ed. Brásio, I, 84 (década 1, book 3, ch. 9); Robert A. Voeks, *Sacred Leaves of Candomblé: African Magic, Medicine, and Religion in Brazil* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1997), 158. See Ezio Bassani, *African Art and Artefacts in European Collections, 1400–1800*, ed. Malcolm McLeod (London: British Museum, 2000), 277–84; Leslie Gerald Desmangles, “African Interpretations of the Christian Cross in Vodum,” *Sociological Analysis* 38 (1977): 13–24; Cécile Fromont, “Under the Sign of the Cross in the Kingdom of Kongo: Religious Conversion and Visual Correlation in Early Modern Central Africa,” *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 59/60 (2011): 109–23, <https://doi.org/10.1086/RESvn1ms23647785>

33 Brásio, ed., *Monumenta Missionaria*, I, 124–25.

34 Rui de Pina, *Crónica*, 160.

challenged his polytropic brother Mpanzu a Nzinga for the throne. Afonso's military strategy, inspired by the fourth-century Emperor Constantine, was to have all idols burned and replaced with imported images and CrossTech 3.0. Afonso also used Jesus's name as a military tool. With the assistance of Jesus, Mary, and two priests, Afonso proved his right in battle, under a miraculously appearing celestial cross. He ruled from 1509 until 1542.<sup>35</sup>

Afonso became a major patron of Christianization, even managing to fell a royal burial forest. He sought Portuguese support for these undertakings "for the love of Jesus Christ." He was enthusiastically Christian, keen on the social welfare of his people, and Christianity had the support of the Kongolese nobility. Afonso was a passionate student of Christian theology, studying texts sent from Europe until he fell asleep over them in the wee hours. The new Catholic priests stepped into the role previously filled by polytropic priests, and that title (*nganga*) was continued. "Chapel boys," the literate students who would come to staff government and Church offices, went in 1514 to convert the ruler of Mbata. In the capital, Afonso renovated and expanded the old São Salvador church into an impressive edifice built of stone and lime with a grass roof, in contrast to the other non-royal buildings, all built of straw. It contained enough silver vessels for the mass, "celebrated by such musicians and singers as the region allows." Afonso made a physical cross, established in front of the cathedral, in memory of the celestial one that had secured his throne. He had other CrossTech introduced throughout his realms.<sup>36</sup>

Afonso's son Henrique Kinu a Mvemba, after sailing to Europe to deepen his knowledge, was ordained (5 May 1518), nominally as Bishop of Utica in Tunisia, but in fact working at São Salvador. He was the first African south of the Sahara ever to receive such an appointment (rl. 1518–31). He later became a professor in Portugal.

The success of Christianity in Kongo was atypical for Africa in this period, and depended on a convergence of many people's motivations. In contrast, in

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35 Afonso I to Manuel I (5 October 1514), in *Monumenta Missionaria*, ed. Brásio, I, 295; João de Barros, *Da Ásia*, in *Monumenta Missionaria*, ed. Brásio, I, 144. See Fromont, "Under the Sign of the Cross," 113.

36 Afonso I to João III (25 August 1526), in *Monumenta Missionaria*, ed. Brásio, I, 480; Rui de Aguiar to Manuel I (25 May 1516), in *Monumenta Missionaria*, ed. Brásio, I, 361–63; Afonso I to Manuel I (5 October 1514), in *Monumenta Missionaria*, ed. Brásio, I, 322–23; Afonso I to João III (25 August 1526), in *Monumenta Missionaria*, ed. Brásio, I, 477–81; Martinho de Ulhoa, "De Statu Regni Congi," in *Monumenta Missionaria*, ed. Brásio, III, 511. See François Bontinck, "Les croix de bois dans l'ancien Royaume de Kongo," in *Dalla chiesa antica alla chiesa moderna*, ed. M. Fois, V. Monachino, and F. Litva (Rome: Gregoriana, 1983), 199–213; Duarte Lopes, *Relatione del reame di Congo et delle circonvicine contrade*, trans. Filippo Pigafetta (Rome: Grassi, 1591), 53.



Benin, almost 2,000 km to the northwest of Kongo, the unusually aggressive Lord Ozolua in 1514 sent an embassy to Portugal to ask for firearms, and for Christianity if that was part of the arms-trade package. The Portuguese were disinclined to give the Beninese the guns they sought, and the Beninese refused to give the Portuguese the slaves they sought. Missionaries arriving in 1515 soon realized that no conversion would take place without the import of firearms, and left, annoyed.

## Towards the Americas' Eastern Seaboard

In the Americas, the Jesus cult was established only in Greenland, but, in 1400, even this was failing—among the signs of cultural collapse were Norsemen with hairless chins. Danish efforts to promote Christianity in Greenland had been motivated in part by a desire to secure a trade route to Asia, to liberate Jerusalem, and to locate the kingdom of Prester John, understood to have been founded by a Dane. The northwest corner of the cult's geographical triangle was anchored, barely, by the Eastern Settlement of anticlerical Norse farmers in Greenland, whose ancestors had come across from Iceland four centuries earlier. Bishop Álfur had arrived in Greenland in 1368, the first bishop there since the 1340s. In 1385, Björn Einarsson (ca. 1350–1415) sailed to Greenland without royal permission, accidentally or “accidentally,” and made enough of a profit trading with the Greenlanders that a customs officer brought a lawsuit (in which Björn was acquitted); a seventeenth-century account, the oldest extant, of Björn's journey mentions that Álfur had died and some elderly priest was filling in. Björn connected the periphery with the sacred centre: a pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 1406 earned him the epithet Jerusalem-Farer. Archaeologists recently exhuming the dead have found them wearing late-fourteenth century fashions, and the last known voyage between Norway and the Eastern Settlement happened in 1410. In 1433, one ill-informed pope thought Greenland was a city. A “Western Settlement” to the north had already died out, leaving CrossTech traces, imported or made locally from driftwood, and a rune stick inscribed with references to Jesus, including his cry from the cross, in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. Thule Inuit were moving into the area; perhaps they found and re-purposed these relics.<sup>37</sup>

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37 Gustav Storm and H. J. Huitfeldt-Kaas, ed., *Diplomatarium Norvegicum*, 23 vols. (Christiania: P.T. Malling, 1903), XVII, 404–05, no. 514. See Richard Cole, “Hebrew in Runic Inscriptions and Elsewhere,” *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 11 (2015): 64–71, <https://doi.org/10.1484/J.VMS.5.109599>; Janus Møller Jensen, *Denmark and the Crusades: 1400–1650* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 198–200, <https://doi.org/10.1163/ej.9789004155794.i-423>; Gunnar Karlsson, *History of Iceland* (Minneapolis, MN:

In this period, the eastern American seaboard, from Brazil to Newfoundland, formally came into the European geographical consciousness (see Fig 7.7). Some of the exploration was fleeting. On 24 June 1497, John Cabot (ca. 1450–1500) came upon land some 2900 km west of Ireland, probably Newfoundland, and disembarked brandishing a cross. Fishermen followed, but colonization and mission came only a century later. This section therefore concentrates on the more sustained expansion processes in the Caribbean and Brazil.<sup>38</sup>



Fig. 7.7 Expansion in the Americas, Taf Richards, Arcane Atlas Cartography (@Arcane\_Atlas). CC BY-NC.

University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 103; Erik Moltke, "Greenland Runic Inscriptions IV," *Meddelelser om Grønland* 88 (1936): 228–30; Kirsten A. Seaver, *The Frozen Echo: Greenland and the Exploration of North America, ca. A.D. 1000–1500* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1996), 126–30, 173–74.

- 38 James A. Williamson and R. A. Skelton, ed., *The Cabot Voyages and Bristol Discovery under Henry VII* (London: Routledge, 2017), 207, 211–14, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315614274>

## The Caribbean

Atlantic islands and seaways had long been known, and forgotten, and known and forgotten again, before our period begins. By the 1380s, the Canaries and Azores were mostly known. Missionaries had even used peaceful methods—learning the local languages and acting as role models—to convert the Canarians, but pirate violence in the 1390s halted the mission for four decades. No records remain—perhaps no records were ever kept—of eastward sailings by Americans, but a young Christopher Columbus (1451–1506) found in Galway, on the west coast of Ireland, “many signs” that Indigenous people had “come from the West.” There, he reported, “a man and a woman, of extraordinary appearance, have come to land on two tree trunks,” presumably canoes.<sup>39</sup>

In 1418, the Portuguese captain João Gonçalves Zarco (ca. 1390–1471), blown off course, had formally discovered and recorded the discovery of the Madeira Archipelago, which may have informally been known to sailors already in the age of the medieval Vikings. While rounding Madeira Island, he discovered downed trees he used to form a giant cross, at what would become the site of Santa Cruz [Holy Cross], a major settlement. Over the following century, the Portuguese discovered previously unknown islands throughout the Atlantic, and islands previously unknown to Europeans in the Indian Ocean.<sup>40</sup>

In 1492, Columbus took a short-cut to Asia. He knew the Atlantic relatively well. He had lived in Madeira, at Porto Santo, where his father-in-law was governor, and had visited Elmina (see above) around 1481. Now he proposed to sail west, to Asia, to convert the Chinese to Christianity, and to secure funds for the reconquest of Jerusalem, “for which purpose this enterprise was undertaken,” as he later explained. Queen Isabella I of Castile (1451–1504) approved the journey, against the advice of her husband Ferdinand (1479–1516) and her council. Isabella and Ferdinand, named “athletes of Christ” by the pope, gave letters to Columbus to deliver to their Asian counterparts. Two were form letters, to “the most serene prince [blank], our friend most dear,” and the third addressed the Great Khan, ruler of the Yuan dynasty. To improve communication with the Asians, Columbus brought along a translator, who spoke Hebrew and some Arabic.<sup>41</sup>

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39 Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *Before Columbus: Exploration and Colonisation from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic, 1229–1492* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 232–33; David B. Quinn, “Columbus and the North: England, Iceland, and Ireland,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 49 (1992): 278–97.

40 Gaspar Frutuoso, *As Saudades da terra* (Funchal: Funchalense, 1873), 37–38.

41 Antonio Rumeu de Armas, *Nueva luz sobre las capitulaciones de Santa Fe* (Madrid: CSIC, 1985), 127; Christopher Columbus, *Synoptic Edition of the Log of Columbus's First Voyage*, ed. Francesca Lardicci, trans. Cynthia L. Chamberlin and Blair

Columbus was a continent and a century off course. The Yuan dynasty had ended in 1368, and the island he landed on was not part of the Japanese archipelago, but one of the many in what is now the Bahamas, or Turks and Caicos. The locals called it Guanahani; Columbus named it after Jesus: San Salvador, the holy saviour. Exploration resounded with Jesus-related names. On Christmas 1492, his flagship the Santa Maria, its tiller left in the hands of the ship's boy, became beached on sandbanks off the coast of Hispaniola. Columbus ordered a fort built there, naming it after the holiday, La Navidad, the Nativity. A cape on the northern coast of Cuba Columbus named Cabo Alpha y Omega, a title associated with Jesus in the New Testament. In January 1503, Columbus created a settlement at a river mouth on the coast of what is now Panama, naming the garrison and river Belén (Bethlehem), in honour of Epiphany, the feast celebrating the Magi's arrival at Bethlehem. When the Indigenous people proved unwelcoming, Columbus moved his ships to safety away from the fort and its skeleton garrison, when a voice called him "O ye of little faith" and commanded, "rise up, for I am here. Do not be afraid." The words, and perhaps the voice, was Jesus's.<sup>42</sup>

Sometimes Indigenous peoples impressed Columbus with their innocence and potential as Christians: "They carry no weapons, nor are they aware of them; for I showed them swords, and they picked them up by the blade and cut themselves through ignorance. [...] I believe that they will easily be made Christians, for it seemed to me that they belonged to no religion. If it please our Lord, at the time of my departure, I shall take six of them to your Highnesses so that they can learn to talk." Columbus mentioned that the Cubans, although they did not normally pray, had learned to make the sign of the cross. That locals "are very quick to copy any prayer we recite for them and they can make the sign of the Cross" made Columbus optimistic about rapid mass conversion.<sup>43</sup>

The Taíno being Yúcahu Bagua Maórocoti had a powerful virgin mother, Atabey Yermao Guacar Apito Zuimaco, who was, like Mary, associated with

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Sullivan, *Repertorium Columbianum* 6 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1999), 37–38, 307–08; Columbus to the Catholic Monarchs, 4 March 1493, in Margarita Zamora, *Reading Columbus* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), 194–95. See Carol Delaney, *Columbus and the Quest for Jerusalem* (London: Duckworth, 2012), 67–72; Carol Delaney, "Columbus's Ultimate Goal: Jerusalem," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 48 (2006): 260–92, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417506000119>

42 Cristóbal Colón, *Textos y documentos completos*, ed. Consuelo Varela (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1982), 106; Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *Columbus on Himself* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2010), 180. See Abulafia, *The Discovery of Mankind*, 233–34; Delaney, *Columbus*, 130, 214.

43 Christopher Columbus, *Synoptic Edition of the Log of Columbus's First Voyage*, ed. Francesca Lardicci, trans. Cynthia L. Chamberlin and Blair Sullivan (Turnhout: Brepols, 1999), 321, 338. See Fernández-Armesto, *Columbus on Himself*, 53, 74.

the moon. In fact, part of Yúcahu Bagua Maórocoti's name means "Conceived without Male Intervention." This local understanding of Jesus, or of a parallel analogue, may have fuelled the Europeans' sense of easy conversion.<sup>44</sup>

Only slowly did missionaries reach the Caribbean, and, even then, they focused their ministry on the Europeans, who admittedly needed the spiritual assistance. Columbus asked the Catholic Monarchs for friars "more to renew the faith within ourselves than to teach it to the Indians," because while the Europeans had conquered the Indigenous in terms of military, the locals had conquered the conquerors culturally, and "we have become worse than they are." Columbus considered the Indigenous Hispaniolans "already Christian" and better behaved than the Christians in Spain. Later, however, the critical Dominican Bartolomé de las Casas (1484–1566) thought little of one friar's religious instruction: "His efforts amounted to nothing more than to say the *Ave Maria* and *Pater Noster* to the Indians, and some words about there being a God in heaven who was the creator of things, according to what he was able to teach them with abundant flaws and in a muddled way."<sup>45</sup>

CrossTech was an important part of Columbus's approach. At the entrance of the harbour at Puerto de la Concepción, named after Mary's conception, Columbus had set up a cross, which he explained represented primarily Jesus, and secondarily Spain's overlordship. After the establishment, Columbus ordered his crew to kidnap some of the locals, "in order to treat them courteously and make them lose their fear." He may have understood that kidnapping as a kind of rescue from a life without Jesus. Tradition remembers that the cross (the Cruz de la Parra) in the church of the Ascension (1511) at Baracoa in Cuba was painted by Columbus himself.<sup>46</sup>

CrossTech provided common ground. One local ruler of Hispaniola boarded Columbus's ship. The communication barrier was frustrating to both sides, but Columbus's display of a banner with the cross visibly "impressed" the ruler. At one village, Columbus set up a cross in its centre: the Taíno were keen, and helped in erecting it, and quickly began worshipping it.<sup>47</sup>

The missionary friar Ramón Pané established a shrine in the territory of the Taíno ruler Guarionex (d. 1502), in Hispaniola. Once the missionary had gone

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44 Ramón Pané, *An Account of the Antiquities of the Indians*, ed. José Juan Arrom, trans. Susan C. Griswold (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1999), 3–4.

45 Columbus, *Synoptic*, 97–98, 380–81; Fernández-Armesto, *Columbus on Himself*, 182; Pané, *Account of the Antiquities*, 57.

46 Oliver Dunn and James E. Kelley, Jr., ed., *The Diario of Christopher Columbus's First Voyage to America, 1492–1493* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989), 218–19; Ernesto de las Cuevas Morillo, *Narraciones históricas de Baracoa*, 2 vols. (Baracoa: La Crónica, 1919), I, 45–48.

47 Fernández-Armesto, *Columbus on Himself*, 82–85; Abulafia, *The Discovery of Mankind*, 166–67.

away, Guarionex's men removed the shrine's images—presumably including crosses and Mary—buried them in a field, and urinated on them. Some historians today, and the Christians then, saw this as resistance, but others have suggested that urine had positive connotations locally. Columbus's nephew Bartholomew burned the perpetrators alive. Cross-shaped yams grew where the icons had been defiled or honoured, which some celebrated as an unambiguous sign of divine rebuke, and others as unambiguous divine approval. They were discovered by Guarionex's mother, no friend to the Christians, and even she recognized them as "a great miracle." Ramón Pané may have seen her apparent conversion as an even more impressive miracle.<sup>48</sup>

What motivated Columbus? In a sales pitch written to the Spanish monarchs in 1501, Columbus urged a new crusade to re-conquer Jerusalem. Columbus and the monarchs agreed to use the profits from gold mining and spice trading to fund the conquest. Mathematics and the plain-ken restrictions of linear time suggested the endeavour's likely success: Columbus based his calculations on the number of years since the birth of Jesus. Only 155 years remained until the end of the world. Because Jesus had "said that before the consummation of this world, first must be fulfilled all the things that were written by the prophets," including the global spread of Christianity, "the Gospel must now be proclaimed to so many lands in such a short time." Jerusalem needed to be conquered, and the world discovered and evangelized, before the world could end. Equally important, Columbus used the gospels to excuse his lack of intellectual authority by appealing to the vicissitudes of skepticism: Insulted publicly and privately as "unlearned in letters, an ignorant mariner, an ordinary man," he quoted Matthew (11:25): "Lord, you have hidden these things from the wise, and revealed them to the innocent." Columbus also used the Old Testament, especially Isaiah and the Psalms, and cited two verses from the Qur'an (3:42, 45). Columbus's religiosity and fixation on Jerusalem increased as he lived, but possibly an apocalyptic urgency motivated even his first voyage. His study of scripture followed the methods of Jean Gerson (1363–1429), and he used that to understand multiple Jerusalems, from the figurative ones to the literal one, that "earthly city to which pilgrims travel."<sup>49</sup>

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48 Pané, *Account of the Antiquities*, 36–38. See José J. Arrom, "Taíno Mythology: Notes on the Supreme Being," *Latin American Literary Review* 8 (1980): 21–37 (23); Anthony M. Stevens-Arroyo, "Juan Mateo Guaticabanú, September 21, 1496: Evangelization and Martyrdom in the Time of Columbus," *The Catholic Historical Review* 82 (1996): 627–35.

49 Cristóbal Colón, *Textos y documentos completos*, ed. Consuelo Varela (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1982), 253–54; Christopher Columbus, *The Libro de las Profecías of Christopher Columbus*, trans. Delno C. West and August Kling (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 1991), 100–11, 226–27 (English translation on p. 109 is incorrect); Fernández-Armesto, *Columbus*, 91–93, 201; B. W. Ife, *Letters*

Columbus surrounded himself with Christological symbols. Returning from his first journey, he entered Seville, perhaps on a donkey, on Palm Sunday. He developed a signature that stacked letters into a pyramid above his name; its meaning has never been demonstrated, but most interpretations find in it references to Jesus. Around 1497, Columbus left money for a church in Hispaniola for mass to be said for his soul, for his family, and for four preachers to convert the locals to save them from damnation. One map of the New World, from about 1500, shows Saint Christopher bearing the Baby Jesus west across the Atlantic, in allusion to Columbus's first name, Christopher, the Christ-bearer.<sup>50</sup>

## Brazil

Like Columbus, Pedro Álvares Cabral made his American discovery unintentionally. In 1500, Cabral, en route to Asia, crossed the equator and turned his fleet westward away from Africa, ending up in South America, at the mouth of the Buranhém River. On 22 April, a few days after Easter, at vespers, Portuguese explorers saw a mountain in the distance. They named the mountain Monte Pascoal (Easter), and the region the Terra de Vera Cruz (Land of the True Cross). Within two years, this new land would get a new name, after the principal export: brazilwood. Writing in 1552, one historian complained that a less important wood had replaced the name of the more important wood.<sup>51</sup>

The Franciscans who accompanied Cabral's expedition disembarked on an offshore island to celebrate a Sunday mass, with the CrossTech banner of the Order of the Knights of Christ flying prominently. The Indigenous Tupis on the mainland observed the mass, and accompanied its finale with a chorus of horns, made of bone, and enthusiastic dance. Two Portuguese carpenters travelling with the fleet made a big cross out of a piece of brazilwood. The Tupis were fascinated, although the Portuguese initially suspected that the fascination was less with the cruciform shape than with the iron tools used in its creation,

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*from America: Columbus' First Accounts of the 1492 Voyage* (London: King's College School of Humanities, 1992), 35–39. I modify the New International Version (NIV) translation of the Matthew verse to better conform to Columbus's own rendering. See Abulafia, *The Discovery of Mankind*, 176; Delaney, *Columbus*, 201; Pauline Moffitt Watts, "Prophecy and Discovery: On the Spiritual Origins of Christopher Columbus's 'Enterprise of the Indies,'" *The American Historical Review* 90 (1985): 73–102.

50 Delaney, *Columbus*, 83, 110–18, 159.

51 Pedro Vaz de Caminha, "Pedro Vaz de Caminha to King Manuel, 1 May 1500," in *The Voyage of Pedro Álvares Cabral to Brazil and India*, ed. William Brooks Greenlee (London: Routledge, 2017), 1–31 (7), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315551647-2>; João de Barros, *Décadas da Ásia* (Lisbon: 1778), 391–92 (1.5.2).

“because they have nothing of iron.” On 30 April, Cabral had his crew go to the cross, which was then leaning against a tree before being raised, to kneel and kiss it. They encouraged a dozen Tupis to do the same, and some obliged. This willingness suggested to the Christians that the Tupis would be easy converts: “They seem to me people of such innocence that, if one could understand them and they us, they would soon be Christians, because they do not have or understand any belief, as it appears.”<sup>52</sup>

On 1 May, a procession of priests and friars carried the cross, decorated with the royal arms, in procession. Hundreds of Tupis gathered to witness its being set up, and dozens of those knelt for the mass, “and when it came to the Gospel and we all rose to our feet with hands lifted, they rose with us and lifted their hands, remaining thus until it was over.” 1502 saw the first baptisms, during a subsequent expedition, under the command of Gonçalo Coelho (fl. 1501–04). Captain Coelho had tin crosses put around the necks of the some four dozen Tupis who accepted the ritual.<sup>53</sup>

In 1504, an expedition of Normans, under the command of Binot Paulmier de Gonneville, reached southern Brazil. To celebrate Easter, the Normans constructed and painted a large cross, on which the name of the French king shared space with the names of the pope, Gonneville himself, and his entire crew. The local Tupi ruler Arosca and his sons joined Gonneville and his officers in escorting the cross in a barefoot procession climaxing in ceremonial artillery fire. Arosca and his peoples were particularly interested in the litany sung by the Normans. When the Christians left, they understood that the Indigenous Tupi had promised, by “signs and other means,” to “safeguard and honour” the cross.<sup>54</sup>

## Legal Issues

How prominent Jesus was in the expansion of his cult varied from place to place, and is sometimes obscure. Jesus was also present at a more subtle and fundamental level—the very legality of these expansions. John Wycliffe (ca. 1328–84) in England set off a chain reaction running through Lithuania to the Americas, to give polytropics *dominium*, the right to rule.<sup>55</sup>

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52 Vaz de Caminha, “Pedro Vaz de Caminha to King Manuel,” 17–29.

53 Vaz de Caminha, “Pedro Vaz de Caminha to King Manuel,” 30–31.

54 Regina Johnson Tomlinson, *The Struggle for Brazil: Portugal and “the French Interloper” (1500–1550)* (New York: Las Americas, 1970), 101–02.

55 James Muldoon, “John Wyclif and the Rights of the Infidels: The Requerimiento Re-Examined,” *The Americas* 36 (1980): 301–16. See Francis A. Sullivan, *Salvation outside the Church* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002), 44–81.



To understand the issues at play, we need to return to a thirteenth-century debate. Alanus Anglicus (fl. ca. 1200), an English or Welsh canon lawyer at Bologna, argued that all *dominium* transferred from the earth's various rulers to Jesus at his Incarnation. Jesus then transferred it to Peter, who transferred it to his successors, the popes. *Dominium* was thus entirely contained within Christendom. Jesus's Incarnation ended any right of non-Christians to rule. A non-Christian ruler might rule in fact, but had no *dominium*, no authority for ruling. Any Christian ruler could legally conquer the realm of any non-Christian ruler. The Italian canonist Hostiensis (ca. 1200–71) argued similarly, only allowing an exception for non-Christian rulers who acknowledged that their *dominium* came from Jesus through the popes.<sup>56</sup>

Pope Innocent IV (1243–54) pushed back against such claims of awesome papal authority. Non-Christians *could* have *dominium*. A war against them might be justified, as for example the crusades to win Jesus's Holy Land, but typically would not be, if it were merely for earthly reward. The Pope did have overarching authority and responsibilities as a missionary and judge, and this authority was universal, encompassing Christians and non-Christians alike. The Pope might, then, be called upon to judge a Jewish society by using Old Testament law, or a polytropic society by using natural law—the implicit rules known to all humans' common sense. The *dominium* that an infidel ruler might justly hold was subordinate to this overarching papal authority. Therefore, infidel rulers' *dominium* did hold, as long as they did not defy the papacy by interfering with the Christian missions.<sup>57</sup>

Thus, the earlier position of Hostiensis meant that Christian invasion was always licit because infidels had no *dominium*. Innocent's position meant that invasion was licit only when the infidels lost their *dominium* by refusing to admit missionaries.

Wycliffe came at this debate from a different starting point: could a priest in a state of sin effectively celebrate the Eucharist? (See Chapter 12.) Such a priest, with outstanding sins, could not, Wycliffe insisted: "No one is a civil lord,

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56 Hostiensis, *Lectura quinque Decretalium or Lectura sive apparatus domini* (3.34.8), quoted in Joseph Adam Gustav Hergenröther, *Katholische Kirche und christlicher Staat in ihren geschichtlichen*, 2 vols. (Freiburg: Herder, 1872), I, 334. See A. M. Stickler, "Alanus Anglicus als Verteidiger des monarchischen Papsttums," *Salesianum* 21 (1959): 346–406.

57 Innocent IV, *In quinque libros decretalium: Commentaria* (Turin: Bernardinum Maiorinum, 1581), 255–56. See James Muldoon, "Extra ecclesiam non est imperium: The Canonists and the Legitimacy of Secular Power," *Studia Gratiana* 9 (1966): 553–80.

nor a bishop, nor a prelate, while in mortal sin."<sup>58</sup> In a parallel way, Wycliffe argued, *dominium* depended on a similar state of grace: a secular ruler had no *dominium* without grace. Presumably, that would allow any Christian to conquer any infidel, but in fact Wycliffe held that such conquest was legal only if there was a refusal of missionaries, for Christians had an obligation to care for non-believers. Secular rulers, however, should reform their own states before launching missions. In contrast to the idea that the Incarnation of Jesus removed *dominium* from infidel rulers, Wycliffe saw the Incarnation's consequence as the end of the wars of religion—the Old Testament was no longer sufficient to justify them, after Jesus had preached his message of love.<sup>59</sup>

Here Wycliffe's plain-ken inclination was considerable. *Dominium* was not absolute, but depended on the ruler being in a state of grace. Grace, however, was temporary and unknowable to humans.<sup>60</sup>

The Council of Constance (1414–18) saw the danger in Wycliffe's teachings. If they were true, a sin-test would determine whether a priest could celebrate the Eucharist, and whether even a Christian ruler could wage war. Constance condemned Wycliffism, and then condemned Jan Hus (ca. 1370–1415) for following it. When Hus asserted the secular rulers' need for grace for *dominium*, Emperor Sigismund (1368–1437) rejected it utterly: if it were true, no ruler could have *dominium*.<sup>61</sup>

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58 The same phrasing is used in 1382 and in 1418. For 1382, see William Courtenay, "Epistola Willelmi Cantuariensis super condemnatione hæresum Wyclyff in synodo," in *Fasciculi Zizaniorum Magistri Johannis Wyclif*, ed. Walter Waddington Shirley (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, and Roberts, 1858), 280. For 1418, *Sacrorum conciliorum nova, et amplissima collectio*, ed. Giovanni Domenico Mansi, 31 vols. (Venice: Zatta, 1784), XXVII, col. 1208. See Wycliffe, *De Civili Dominio*, ed. Reginald Lane Poole, 4 vols. (London: Trübner, 1885), I, 22.

59 Wycliffe, *De Civili Dominio*, II, 1–8, 244–50.

60 Even his idea of predestination was towards the plain ken: predestination, which should be outside time, was not static, but was a repeated iteration of being in, and ultimately remaining in, a state of grace. Only from God's perspective was predestination stable and knowable. For example, Jesus's disciple Peter repeatedly sinned, while his disciple Judas repeatedly did good. God, however, loved unrighteous Peter more than righteous Judas, because Peter was predestined. The pope himself could not even be certain that he led the true Church, let alone that he would be saved. John Wycliffe, *De Ecclesia*, ed. Johann Loserth (London: Trübner, 1886), 5, 140. See Anthony Kenny, *Wyclif* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985), 69–72.

61 Kenny (*Wyclif*, 93) points out that Wycliffe restricted his conclusions on dominion's dependence on grace to the clergy. See Peter of Mladoňovice, "An Account of the Trial and Condemnation of Master John Hus in Constance," in *John Hus at the Council of Constance*, ed. Matthew Spinka (New York: Columbia UP, 1965), 171–72; Jan Hus, *Historiae et monumentorum Joannis Hus atque Hieronymi Pragensis, confessorum Christi*, 2 vols. (Nuremberg: Joannis Montani et Ulrici Neuberi, 1715), I, 329–30.

The issue had real application for the Council when the question of Lithuania reached Constance. The Teutonic Knights argued, following Alanus, that the Catholic Lithuanians (and maybe even the Poles, who were even more obviously Catholic) were essentially infidels, outside of a state of grace, for their old “blindness” was still evident. They thus lacked *dominium*, and could and must be conquered. Their lawyers compared the Knights’ war of reconquest to the Reconquista of Iberia from the Muslims.<sup>62</sup> The Polish scholar Paweł Włodkowic (1370–1435) argued against this: accepting the Knights’ argument that grace was necessary for authority would not only dissolve the right of infidels to rule—not necessarily a problem—but would also undermine the right to rule of a Christian ruler suspected of sin, and make uncertain the ability of a priest suspected of sin to perform the Eucharist. Following Innocent IV, Włodkowic argued that the Knights had no right to attack the Lithuanians unless they had blocked the Gospel. In fact, the Knights themselves had blocked the Lithuanians’ conversion, and the pope inherited Jesus’s commission to Peter to “feed my sheep” (Jn 21:17), which included non-believers. The Council saw the danger, saw the Wycliffism implicitly lurking in the Knights’ position, and condemned their argument. Thus, Innocent’s views triumphed over those of Alanus and Hostiensis.<sup>63</sup>

The Council of Florence (1442) noted the impending damnation of non-Christians, as well as of those Christians who strayed into heresy or schism. Of course, anyone damned by a just God deserved that damnation, and so non-Christians in some sense wilfully refused to become Christians.<sup>64</sup>

Contact with previously unknown peoples created a new opportunity to contemplate these issues. Some theologians felt that barbarian “humans” were not fully human, as they did not have reason. Thus they were “natural” slaves in theory—and might benefit by being made legal slaves in practice. In the 1430s, the Bologna law professors Antonio de Rosellis (1381–1466) and Antonio Minucci da Pratovecchio (ca. 1380–1464) followed Innocent and Constance: *dominium* did not depend on grace—indeed its origin was in the disorder of the Fall itself—and Jesus’s Incarnation did not hinder non-Christians’ natural-law ability to rule. Polytropic peoples who offended natural law by refusing

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62 “Johannes de Rocha verteidigt vor seiner Nation Falkenberg...” in *Acta Concilii constanciensis*, ed. Heinrich Finke, 4 vols. (Münster: Regensberg’schen, 1928), IV, 365.

63 Vladimiri, “Opinio Hostiensis,” in *Paulus Vladimiri and His Doctrine Concerning International Law and Politics*, ed. Stanislaus F. Belch, 2 vols. (The Hague: Mouton, 1965), II, 864–68. James Muldoon, *Popes, Lawyers, and Infidels: The Church and the Non-Christian World, 1250–1550* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1979), 112, points out that Vladimiri errs in ascribing this belief to Wyclif.

64 Stuart B. Schwartz, *All Can Be Saved: Religious Tolerance and Salvation in the Iberian Atlantic World* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2008), 37–38.

missionaries had no recourse to it.<sup>65</sup> Invoking papal universal responsibility, in 1434, Pope Eugene IV (1388–1447) forbade European Christians from entering the Canary Islands, to protect their convert-Christian and non-Christian populations.

The kings of Portugal howled their protests at papal interference in an enterprise they described as inherently Christian. King Edward (1391–1438, r. 1433–38) invoked the four hundred converts made at first contact between Portuguese and Canarians: “Where the name of Christ had never been known, Christ is now worshipped.” Accepting that Jesus had given the pope “the fullness of this power over the entire world,” Edward underlined the evident purity of his motivations, for he had acted “more indeed for the salvation of the souls of the pagans of the islands than for his own personal gain, for there was nothing for him to gain.” In the Canaries, the non-Christians were barbaric, he claimed, and the Christian ones upstanding and loyal. Both would benefit by European conquest. If Rome refused to authorize the Portuguese, other less Catholic powers would invade instead.<sup>66</sup>

The papal bull *Romanus Pontifex* (1436, 1455) confirmed rights of the Portuguese in the Canaries—and, in revised versions, across broader geographies—within the context of the vision of Innocent and the Bologna scholars. The pope was the vicar of Jesus, who gave the papacy the keys to Heaven, and therefore Rome had ultimate authority. The 1493 follow-up *Inter Caetera* expanded *Romanus*: because Jesus had entrusted his flocks to Peter, conquest was acceptable to care for Indigenous peoples “well disposed to embrace the Christian faith.”<sup>67</sup> Where Włodkovic previously used Jesus’s sheep

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65 A. Minucci Da Pratovecchio and A. Roselli, “Quidam princeps seu rex catholicus, non recognoscens superiorem, vult inducer bellus contra sarracenos, non possidentes nec detinentes terras ipsius regis, sed detinentes terras quae fuerunt aliorum christianorum, quemadmodum,” in *Monumenta Henricina*, ed. Antonio Domingues de Sousa Costa, 15 vols. (Coimbra: n.p., 1963), V, 285–343. See Jeremy Lawrance, “Alfonso de Cartagena on the Affair of the Canaries (1436–37): Humanist Rhetoric and the Idea of the Nation-state in Fifteenth-century Castile,” paper presented at Historians of Medieval Iberia, University of Birmingham, September 1989; Anthony Pagden, *Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1999); P. E. Russell, “El descubrimiento de Canarias y el debate medieval acerca de los derechos de los principes y pueblos paganos,” *Revista de Historia Canaria* 36 (1978): 9–32; P. E. Russell, “Some Portuguese Paradigms for the Discovery and Conquest of Spanish America,” *Renaissance Studies* 6 (1992): 377–90.

66 Letter from King Duarte I of Portugal to Pope Eugene IV, in James Muldoon, ed., *The Expansion of Europe: The First Phase* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1977), 54–56.

67 These are available in Latin and English in *European Treaties Bearing on the History of the United States and its Dependencies*, ed. Frances Gardiner Davenport

reference to condemn attempts to conquer the Lithuanians, now the same doctrine was used to defend the conquest of the Canaries. To “take care” of someone had a range of implications, in practice.

The Treaty of Alcáçovas (1479) recognized Spain’s rights over the Canaries. In 1481, the Spanish Crown gave inhabitants of the Canary Islands the usual trade and migration rights. Converted, they came under the protection of the monarchs, whom they recognized as their *señores naturales* [natural lords]. Considerably more liberal-minded perspectives were held by the Canary Islands locals themselves; some felt that “each person could be saved in his or her own law” and “all those who do good go to paradise.”<sup>68</sup>

The upshot of all these debates found its iconic form in the Spanish Requerimiento of 1513, written by Juan de Palacios Rubios (1450–1524), who believed that salvation could come through the Gospel implicit in natural law. To protect Spain against charges of Wycliffism, he took up Innocent IV’s vision that allowed for infidel *dominium* under a universal papal authority: “Of all these nations God our Lord gave charge to one man, called St. Peter, that he should be Lord and Superior of all the men in the world, that all should obey him, and that he should be the head of the whole Human Race, wherever men should live, and under whatever law, sect, or belief they should be.” The pope thus had the right to judge not only Christians, but “Moors, Jews, Gentiles, and all other Sects.” Following Innocent, Palacios Rubios emphasized that an infidel ruler was worthy of *dominium* only as long as he allowed missionaries. Palacios Rubios thus recalled Jesus’s command: “As you enter the home, give it your greeting. If the home is deserving, let your peace rest on it; if it is not, let your peace return to you. If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, leave that home or town and shake the dust off your feet.”<sup>69</sup> Here Palacios Rubios takes up the gospel distinction between the welcoming and unwelcoming home,

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(Washington, DC: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1917), 9–26. See Charles-Martial de Witte, “Les bulles pontificales et l’expansion portugaise au XVe siècle,” *Revue d’Histoire Ecclesiastique* 48 (1953): 683–718 and 53 (1958): 5–46 and 443–71.

- 68 Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *The Canary Islands after the Conquest* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1981), 125; Fernández-Armesto, *Before Columbus*, 214; Manuela Ronquillo Rubio, *Los orígenes de la Inquisición en Canarias, 1488–1526* (Las Palmas: Ediciones del Cabildo Insular de Gran Canaria, 1991), 240; Schwartz, *All Can Be Saved*, 41; Fajardo Spínola, *Las víctimas del Santo Oficio: Tres siglos de actividad de la Inquisición de Canarias* (Las Palmas: Las Palmas de Gran Canaria Dirección General de Universidades e Investigación, 2003), 151–92; Dominik Josef Wölfel, “La Curia Romana y la Corona de España en la defensa de los aborígenes Canarios,” *Anthropos* 25 (1930): 1011–83 (1079).
- 69 Juan López de Palacios Rubios, *De las islas del mar océano*, trans. Agustín Millares Carlo (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1954), 37. Mt 10:11–15, Mk 6:10–11; Lk 9:5. See Schwartz, *All Can Be Saved*, 37–38.

but his deep ken finds consonance between Jesus's departure and the Spaniards' invasion.

## Envoi

The cult of Jesus continued to expand beyond the fifteenth century, and the legal debates of that time underlie discussions of settler-colonialism today. The seventeenth century saw the development of global missionary networks, and, in the nineteenth century, advances in European military and transportation technologies facilitated the "discovery" of Christian religious technology by upland Indigenous peoples globally.<sup>70</sup> Some recognized the cross, of Jesus himself, as Indigenous. As a result of these processes, half the humans on the planet today identify as members of groups that acknowledge Jesus as God, a god, or a prophet.

In 1775, Christians onboard the *Santiago* and the *Sonora* reached the coast of British Columbia, where I am writing this book, but chose not to come ashore; in 1914, Muslims onboard the *Komagata Maru* reached the coast, but were not allowed to come ashore. In 1975, the Athapaskan sculptor Stanley Peters carved the *Totem Cross*, a crucified Jesus-as-Thunderbird. He explained that the *Cross's* four colours represented "all races, black and yellow, red and white."<sup>71</sup> About fifteen years later, the visiting Anglican Archbishop of Singapore attempted to exorcise what he considered to be "evil spirits" from the totem poles in Vancouver's Stanley Park.<sup>72</sup> Both the sculptor's inclusion and the prelate's vigilance echo impulses found also in the fifteenth century, although the secularism dominant today in the global West reduces these subtle realities to mere artifacts of human culture.

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70 Luke Clossey, *Salvation and Globalization in the Early Jesuit Missions* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2008), <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511497278>; Kyle Jackson, *The Mizo Discovery of the British Raj: Empire and Religion in Northeast India, 1890–1920* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009267359>

71 *Art Collection d'art* (Ottawa: Canadian Catholic Conference, 1976), 22.

72 Ferdy Baglo, "Canadian Bishop Blocks Asian Church Leader from Visiting His Diocese," *Christianity Today* (1 November 1999), <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/1999/novemberweb-only/41.0d.html>; Marianne Meed Ward, "Ingham Says Nay to Tay," *Anglican Journal*, 1 November 1, 1999, <http://anglicanjournal.com/ingham-says-nay-to-tay-584/>



# TANGIBLES





## 8. Jesus Objects

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Jesus, even fifteen centuries after his life on earth, could still be physically touched. Parts of his body remained to be cherished, used, or doubted. Christian priests regularly transformed bread and wine into his body and blood, to be eaten and drunk. These three chapters touch on aspects of the tangibles of the Jesus cult. This chapter presents some examples of the variety of Jesus-related objects, discusses their functions, and considers contemporary attitudes towards them. Chapter 9 looks at the body-and-blood-creating Eucharist ritual and its liturgical context of the mass. Chapter 10 focuses on the physical production and use of two most important Jesus books, the Qur'an and the Bible.

For modern eyes, perhaps the most impressive Jesus objects were machines. In the 1350s, two Three Magi automata were built in Germany (Strasbourg, Frankenberg in Hessen), and in the early fifteenth century, two new German ones were built (Villingen, Olmütz), as well as a Swedish one at Lund. In the second half of the century, the trend reached Italy (Bologna, Reggio Emilia, Venice).<sup>1</sup> The Strasbourg Magi automaton was part of a large (11.7 m tall and 4.1 m wide) astronomical clock, called the Eighth Wonder of the World. At its base, a calendar disk, correctly showing the distance between Christmas and Easter, rotated at a rate of 0.10 cm per hour to complete one revolution each year. Above was an astrolabe revealing the current location of the sun and the moon. Above this the robotic Three Magi emerged to bow homage to the newborn Jesus.<sup>2</sup> In the similar Villingen version the Baby Jesus automatically turned to the Magi to acknowledge their bows.<sup>3</sup> Perched upon a side tower was a clockwork cock, a wooden rooster augmented with iron feathers and a copper comb, that crowed to alarm parishioners into alertness, not only recalling the cock who crowed

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1 Günther Oestmann, *The Astronomical Clock of Strasbourg Cathedral* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 9–23, <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004423473>

2 Conradus Dasypodius, *Warhafftige Ausslegung und Beschreybung des Astronomischen Uhrwercks zu Strassburg* (Strasbourg: Wyriot, 1580), 1–7.

3 Franz Xaver Kraus, ed., *Die Kunstdenkmäler des Kreises Villingen* (Freiburg: Mohr, 1890), 124.

three time at Peter's denial of Jesus but also looking forward to Jesus's return (see Fig. 8.1).<sup>4</sup>



Fig. 8.1 Mechanical Cock, Alfred Ungerer, *Description de l'horloge astronomique de la cathédrale de Strasbourg* (Strasbourg: Ungerer, 1919), Wikimedia Commons, public domain, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Coq\\_automate\\_de\\_1%27horloge\\_astronomique\\_de\\_la\\_cath%C3%A9drale\\_de\\_Strasbourg.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Coq_automate_de_1%27horloge_astronomique_de_la_cath%C3%A9drale_de_Strasbourg.jpg)

Collections of Jesus-cult objects could also be awesome for their quantities. We can get a sense of their number, both absolute and relative to all the goods in a household, by looking at the ca. 1398–99 list of the treasures owned by King Richard II of England (1367–1400). This scroll inventory comprises 1206 entries along its length of 28 m. About a quarter, some three hundred, are for chapel use, including processional and altar-top crosses as well as mass utensils. The inventory notes their monetary value. It would have taken a master craftsman about 23,000 years to earn the equivalent.<sup>5</sup> Even in a single pious household, at least in a commercial node like Venice, you might find “paternosters and rosary beads; medals and plaquettes bearing sacred subjects; crucifixes wrought in precious metals and ornamented with gemstones; small basins containing holy

4 Mt 26:69–75; Mk 14:66–72; Lk 22:54–62; Jn 18:15–27.

5 Inventories of the Treasures of Richard II (1398–99), National Archives of the United Kingdom, Kew, E 101/411/9.

water; wooden holy dolls; and the Agnus Dei."<sup>6</sup> Rome was seen as a giant "Jesus giftshop."<sup>7</sup>

## Relics

Most of the physical objects used in the Jesus cult were made by humans out of cloth, metal, and wood. Their power derived from their utility, their resonance, and their grandeur. More important was the class of objects not recently made, but preserved through the centuries: a "relic"—the word literally means "what is left behind"—had some physical contact with Jesus but had been "left behind," and kept some of the power "left behind" by Jesus. Similarly, but on a much smaller scale, the ability to heal which manifested in Bernardino of Siena's (1380–1444) sermons was, after his death, left behind in his body parts, which his successor John of Capistrano (1386–1456) used to effect more healings.<sup>8</sup>

## Body Relics

The most intimate Jesus relics were parts of his body. These included his umbilical cord (at Chalons-sur-Marne) and his nails (at Charroux). The Abbey de la Trinité in Vendôme had a tear shed by Jesus at the death of Lazarus, which Mary Magdalene had entrusted to an angel.<sup>9</sup>

Especially common and powerful was Jesus's blood. Mantua had a blood relic. Bruges did as well, although during the fifteenth century it became less reliably miraculous<sup>10</sup> Melchiorre Trevisan (1434–1500) in 1480 donated a drop of Jesus's blood, dissolved in Mary Magdalene's funeral oil, probably brought from Constantinople, to the Franciscans' Santa Croce Basilica in Florence. A tabernacle was made to hold the blood, in the church's Chapel of St. Michael.

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6 Margaret A. Morse, "Creating Sacred Space: The Religious Visual Culture of the Renaissance Venetian Casa," *Renaissance Studies* 21 (2007): 151–84 (163), <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1477-4658.2007.00357.x>

7 Peter Burke, *The Italian Renaissance: Culture and Society in Italy*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2014), 236.

8 Katherine Jansen, "The Word and its Diffusion," in *Christianity in Western Europe, c.1100–c.1500*, ed. Miri Rubin and Walter Simons, Cambridge History of Christianity 4 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP 2009), 114–32 (129), <https://doi.org/10.1017/cho19780521811064.011>

9 Philipp Blom, *To Have and to Hold: An Intimate History of Collectors and Collecting* (London: Penguin Books, 2002), 146, counts thirty-one nail relics in Europe today.

10 Craig Harbison, *Jan Van Eyck: The Play of Realism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Reaktion, 2012), 212.

That blood proved to be miraculous, and annual processions continued at least into the sixteenth century.<sup>11</sup>

From our perspective, perhaps the most unexpected body-part relic is the Holy Prepuce, Jesus's foreskin. According to tradition, Mary had given the foreskin, and perhaps the umbilical cord, to Mary Magdalene, who gave it to an angel, who gave it to Charlemagne (747–814), whose grandson Charles the Bald (823–77) brought it to Rome.<sup>12</sup> In the centuries around 1400, the foreskin was alleged to be in over thirty locations, including Aachen, Charroux, Rome, and Coulombs (Eure-et-Loir).<sup>13</sup> We might explain multiplicity by excess confidence in cautious reports, a foreskin moving between places, its division by humans, or its multiplication by miracle. In some cases, the foreskin existed in a more mystical sense: in the 1370s, Catherine of Siena (1347–80) had written that nuns intent on “marrying” Jesus understood his foreskin as engagement rings (see Chapter 20).<sup>14</sup> This multiplicity increased the foreskin's usefulness. In 1379, Antipope Clement VII (1342–94) proclaimed an indulgence linked to the Holy Foreskin at Charroux,<sup>15</sup> and Pope Martin V (1369–1431) did the same for its counterpart at Boulogne.<sup>16</sup> Parallel foreskin indulgences were proclaimed in 1446, 1584, 1640, 1647, and 1661.<sup>17</sup> The Abbey Church at Coulombs rushed their

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- 11 Francesco Sansovino, *Venetia, città nobilissima et singolare* (Venice: Sansovino, 1581), 38r, 65rv. See Marie-Dominique Chenu, “Sang du Christ,” in *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, ed. Alfred Vacant, 15 vols. (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1939), XIV, part 1, col. 1094–97; Rona Goffen, *Piety and Patronage in Renaissance Venice* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1990), 21; Amédée Teetaert, “Sixte IV,” *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, ed. Alfred Vacant, 15 vols. (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1941), XIV, part 2, col. 2199–2200.
  - 12 A variation of this standard account is recorded in Petrus Comestor, *Historia Scolastica*, in Adam of Dryburgh, *Opera Omnia*, in *Patrologia Latina*, ed. J.-P. Migne, 217 vols. (Paris: Garnier, 1855), CXCVIII, col. 1541.
  - 13 Johannes Gielemans, “Translatio SS. Praeputii Antverpian,” in *De codicibus hagiographicis Iohannis Gielemans* (Brussels: Bollandistes, 1895), 428–30; Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legende* (Westminster: Caxton, 1483), fol. 7v–8r. See Robert P. Palazzo, “The Veneration of the Sacred Foreskin(s) of Baby Jesus—A Documented Analysis,” in *Multicultural Europe and Cultural Exchange*, ed. James P. Helfers (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), 155–76 (173–74), <https://doi.org/10.1484/m.asmar-eb.3.3039>; Amy G. Remensnyder, “Legendary Treasure at Conques: Reliquaries and Imaginative Memory,” *Speculum* 71 (1996): 890–97.
  - 14 Catherine of Siena, *The Letters of Catherine of Siena*, trans. Suzanne Noffke, 4 vols. (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2000), I, 147–48.
  - 15 Pierre Saintyves, *Les Reliques et les Images légendaires* (Paris: Mercvre de France, 1912), 179.
  - 16 “Monasterium Caroffense, O.S.B., in quo praeputium Jesu Christi, destructum, proventus annihilati,” in *La désolation des églises, monastères, hopitaux en France pendant la guerre de cent ans*, ed. Henri Denifle, 2 vols. (Paris: Picard, 1897), I, 167–68.
  - 17 Cesare Sinibaldi Gambalunga, *Narrazione Critico-Storica del Reliquia preziosissima del Santissimo Prepuzio di N.S. Gesu' Cristo* (Rome: Poggioli, 1802), 32–35.

foreskin to England when the Queen Consort Catherine of Valois (1401–37) was pregnant; this medical intervention allowed her to bear a healthy baby, the future King Henry VI (1421–71).<sup>18</sup>

### Contact Relics

Less intimate were those relics empowered by having been in physical contact with Jesus, especially at key moments, primarily his death, and secondarily his birth. These included wood from the holy manger (Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome), the foot beam from the cross (Manglisi),<sup>19</sup> the Sudarium of Oviedo (a linen covering his face at entombment), various Holy Grail relics used at the Last Supper (one at Valencia, and another, carved from a single emerald, at Genoa),<sup>20</sup> and the unction stone where his corpse was anointed with oil (Jerusalem, a recent discovery from the 1330s).<sup>21</sup>

The Aachen Cathedral, visited by Margery Kempe (ca. 1373–1438), had the *Josefhosen*, Jesus's father's stockings. Joseph had removed them to use as swaddling clothes for his baby son. A Nativity image, from around 1410, in a parish church in Lézignan featured a speech scroll allowing Joseph to proclaim, "Mary, take my hose and wind your dear baby in them." In the deep ken, this relic resonated with the Old Testament: one English sermon explicitly linked this act to Moses approaching the burning bush only for God to warn him, "Do not come any closer [...] Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground" (Exodus 3:5).<sup>22</sup>

Relics of the Passion attracted a particular devotion. In addition to relics of the scourging post, as at Santa Prassede in Rome, a shorter (63-cm-high) column was in the Oratory of San Zeno in Rome, inconspicuously located on the "chapel floor under the sarcophagus." Despite its dissimilar appearance to

18 Chartularium monasterii S. Maglorii Parisiensis, BnF MS Lat. 5413, fol. 200r–01r.

19 Ori Z. Soltes, *National Treasures of Georgia* (London: Philip Wilson, 1999), 371.

20 Catalina Martín Lloris, *Las Reliquias de la Capilla Real en la Corona de Aragón y el Santo Cáliz de la Catedral de Valencia (1396–1458)* (PhD thesis, Universitat De València, 2010); Pero Tafur, *Andanças é Viajes* (Madrid: Ginesta, 1874), 26; Richard Barber, *The Holy Grail: Imagination and Belief* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2004), 168–70; Juliette Wood, *The Holy Grail: History and Legend* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2012), 94–98.

21 Yomit Rachman-Schrire, "Christ's Unction and the Material Realization of a Stone in Jerusalem," in *Natural Materials of the Holy Land and the Visual Translation of Place, 500–1500*, ed. Renana Bartal, Neta Bodner, and Bianca Kühnel (London: Routledge, 2017), 216–29, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315210315-13>

22 J. de Coö, "In Josephs Hosen Jhesus ghewonden wert," *Aachener Kunstblätter* 30 (1965): 144–84; Gail McMurray Gibson, *The Theater of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 58–59.

the more famous larger column, some argued that it was a part of it. Bridget of Sweden (ca. 1303–73) in 1372 had seen another portion of the column at the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.<sup>23</sup> Paris around 1400 housed Duke John of Berry's (1340–1416) reliquary of a Holy Thorn taken from Jesus's crown of thorns.<sup>24</sup> The Church of the Santissimo Crocifisso in Noto, near Syracuse in Sicily, also kept a Holy Thorn, shown annually on Good Friday.<sup>25</sup> The Scala Sancta in Rome were identified as the stairs Jesus had climbed to attend his trial, shipped by Helena from Jerusalem in the early fourth century.

In the gospels, the soldiers at the Crucifixion, admiring the seamless robe Jesus wore, decided to cast lots for it, rather than ruin it by dividing it among themselves (Jn 19:23–24). This “seamless robe” (or tunic, or chiton) of Jesus was claimed to be held in multiple places, including at Trier, in the Patriarchal Cathedral at Mtskheta in Georgia, and in the Benedictine church at Argenteuil in Seine-et-Oise, near Paris.<sup>26</sup> Manuel II Palaiologos (1350–1425) gave “particles” of Jesus's robe to Pope Boniface IX (ca. 1350–1404) (with a declaration of authenticity) in 1401 and to Queen Margaret I of Denmark (1353–1412) in 1402.<sup>27</sup> The Ottoman Sultan Mehmed II (1432–81) wore an amulet that included a piece of it.<sup>28</sup> At the end of the life of Louis XI (1423–83), a holy man sent him “a fragment of the tunic of the Saviour for which the soldiers gambled with dice during the Passion.”<sup>29</sup>

Although contemporary theologians debated whether Jesus was crucified with three nails (“triclavianism”) or four,<sup>30</sup> at least two dozen were known in the Far West. One of the nails was, according to tradition, beaten flat into

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23 Barbara Wisch, “The Passion of Christ in the Art, Theater, and Penitential Rituals of the Roman Confraternity of the Gonfalone,” in *Crossing the Boundaries: Christian Piety and the Arts in Italian Medieval and Renaissance Confraternities*, ed. Konrad Eisenbichler (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1991), 237–62 (246–47).

24 The Holy Thorn Reliquary (ca. 1400), British Museum, London, [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H\\_WB-67](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_WB-67)

25 Maria Adele Di Leo, *Feste popolari di Sicilia* (Rome: Newton and Compton, 1997), 237.

26 François Le Quéré, *La Sainte Tunique d'Argenteuil: histoire et examen de l'authentique tunique sans couture de Jésus-Christ* (Paris: Artège, 2016).

27 George T. Dennis, “Two Unknown Documents of Manuel II Palaeologos,” *Travaux et Mémoires* 3 (1968): 397–404.

28 Francesco Suriano, *Il Trattato di Terra Santa e dell'Oriente*, ed. Girolamo Golubovich (Milan: Artigianelli, 1900), 94.

29 Anne Denieul-Cormier, *Wise and Foolish Kings: The First House of Valois 1328–1498* (New York: Doubleday, 1980), 356; Maren Elisabeth Schwab and Anthony Grafton, *The Art of Discovery: Digging into the Past in Renaissance Europe* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2022), 247–79, <https://doi.org/10.1353/book.109177>

30 In the early Church centuries, it was even debated whether Jesus was crucified with just two nails.

a band, and placed in what would become known as the Iron Crown (which also had relief crosses on its outer rim), used to crown emperors as the King of Italy, such as Charles IV (1355), Sigismund (1431 at Milan), Charles V (1530 at Bologna), and Napoleon I (1805 at Milan, placing it on his own head), who also established the Order of the Iron Cross. In 1449, a nail was used in a procession against plague in Siena.<sup>31</sup>

The greater piece of a broken walnut board, kept in Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, in Rome, was claimed to be the title piece (*titulus*) mockingly labelling Jesus during the Crucifixion. It reads, “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews” in three languages, Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. All three languages run right to left, like Hebrew normally does, and the “Greek” is in fact a highly stylized variation of the Latin.<sup>32</sup> This relic, because text-oriented, was frequently copied. The humanist Hartmann Schedel (1440–1514), who had a general interest in ancient inscriptions,<sup>33</sup> owned multiple woodcuts of it.<sup>34</sup> Note that on these woodcuts (see Fig. 8.2) the letters run in the reverse of the relic, perhaps for easier legibility or to give the impression that they are impressions of the original. To one exemplar, Schedel added his own inscription, *Omnia tempus domat nec ulli fortuna perpetuo bona est* [time tames all, and fortune is not always good to anyone], a quotation from a 1444 letter of the future Pius II (1405–64).<sup>35</sup> These words sum up a plain-ken attitude towards the power and capriciousness of time, perhaps prompted by the 1500-year-old relic or its role in the unjust mocking and torture of Jesus.

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- 31 John Koenig, “Mary, Sovereign of Siena, Jesus, King of Florence: Siege Religion and the Ritual Submission (1260–1637),” *Bullettino senese di storia patria* 115 (2008): 43–163 (63) and 116 (2009): 9–119.
- 32 Raimondo Besozzi, *La storia della Basilica di Santa Croce in Gerusalemme* (Rome: Salomoni, 1750), 29–30, 41, 76–78, 150–52; Stefano Infessura, *Diario della città di Roma*, ed. Oreste Tommasini (Rome: Forzani, 1890), 269–71. See Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance* (New York: Zone, 2010), 218–39, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1453n0p>; David S. Areford, “Multiplying the Sacred: The Fifteenth-Century Woodcut as Reproduction, Surrogate, Simulation,” *Studies in the History of Art* 75 (2009): 135–41.
- 33 Christopher S. Wood, “Notation of Visual Information in the Earliest Archaeological Scholarship,” *Word and Image* 17 (2001): 94–118 (105–09), <https://doi.org/10.1080/02666286.2001.10435704>
- 34 BSB Rar. 287, fol. 333 bis, 334rv.
- 35 Rudolf Wolkan, ed., *Der Briefwechsel des Eneas Silvius Piccolomini*, 3 vols. (Vienna: Hölder, 1909), I, 352. See Schwab and Grafton, *Art of Discovery*, 109–61.



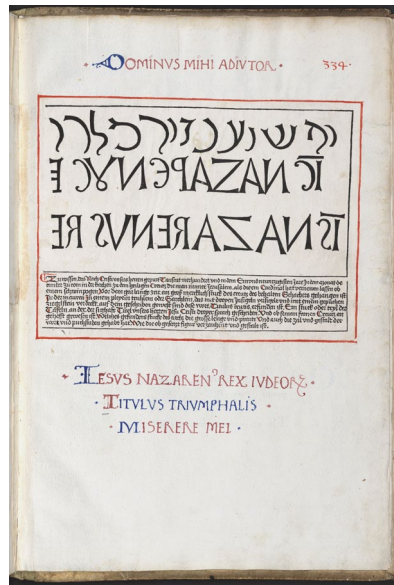


Fig. 8.2 *Titulus* (1493), Hartmann Schedel, *Registrum huius operis libri cronicarum cu figuris et ymagibus ab inicio mundi*, BSB Rar. 287, fol. 333bis, 334rv, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, CC BY-NC-SA, <https://www.digitale-sammlungen.de/en/view/bsb00034024?page=750,751>

A number of lance relics existed in the fifteenth century, including one at Echmiadzin and one at Antioch. The Lance “of Saint Maurice” began the century in Prague. Its power had been augmented by a holy nail and (in 1350 by Emperor Charles IV) by a gilt sleeve which indicated the depth of Jesus’s side wound. In 1424, Emperor Sigismund (1368–1437) transported the lance, and a number of other relics, from Prague to Nuremberg, his birth city. There, it would be displayed annually, for most of the rest of the century.<sup>36</sup> This became an imperial fair, a major commercial event of free trade and free passage; one

36 Julia Schnelbögl, “Die Reichskleinodien in Nürnberg 1424–1523,” *Mitteilungen des Vereins für Geschichte der Stadt Nürnberg* 51 (1962): 78–159; Christoph Gottlieb von Murr, “Diplomatarium Lipsano-Kleinodiographicum s. rom. imp. ab a. 1246 ad a. 1764,” *Journal zur Kunstgeschichte und zur allgemeinen Litteratur* 12 (1784): 37–55; Alfred Wendehorst, “Nuremberg, the Imperial City,” in *Gothic and Renaissance Art in Nuremberg, 1300–1550* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1986), 14–16; Hartmut Kühne, *Ostensio reliquiarum: Untersuchungen über Entstehung, Ausbreitung, Gestalt und Funktion der Heilumsweisungen im römisch-deutschen Regnum* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2000), 133–52. For an illustration, see Peter W. Parshall, *Origins of European Printmaking: Fifteenth-Century Woodcuts and their Public* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 2005), 212–14 (no. 59).

year almost two thousand carts and wagons arrived full of wares. At least one year Barbara Holper attended the festival to hawk engravings made by her son, Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528). The municipal government regulated access to it, for fear of chaos if everyone attempted to capture its power by stabbing it into a piece of cloth or paper. They did agree to use it to pierce cloth for Ferdinand II of Aragon (1452–1516) and Isabella I of Castile (1451–1504), and to dunk it in wine to transfer its power to a healing liquid that could be produced in volume and sold.<sup>37</sup>

By far the most important relic and symbol of the Jesus cult was the cross and its remains.<sup>38</sup> These fragments were often placed in reliquaries made in the form of crucifixes, thus giving the crucifix the power of the actual cross. In the late fourteenth century, the Sumela Monastery in the Empire of Trebizond was given a True Cross relic. Other contemporary bits of the True Cross are in a museum at Opole (Upper Silesia) and the cathedral in Dubrovnik. The Stavrovouni Monastery in Cyprus also claimed a piece.<sup>39</sup> In a 1440 deposition, Gilles de Rais (ca. 1405–40), Joan of Arc's (ca. 1412–31) general, was accused of using a True Cross relic for protection against a winged serpent, a highly suspect use of the relic.<sup>40</sup>

As the premier Jesus relic, True Cross fragments were used for high-level gift-giving. In 1398, Vytautas (ca. 1350–1430) gave a cross relic to an embassy from Muscovy to coax an alliance against the Golden Horde Khan Temür Qutlugh (ca. 1370–99).<sup>41</sup> Charles V of France (1338–80) gave a piece of the True Cross from the Sainte-Chapelle Paris to his brother John of Berry, who had other such pieces in his collection. Emperor Dawit I of Ethiopia (d. 1413) asked visiting European merchants about the fate of the Cross discovered by Helena,

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37 Volker Schier and Corine Schleif, "Seeing and Singing, Touching and Tasting the Holy Lance: The Power and Politics of Embodied Religious Experiences in Nuremberg, 1424–1524," in *Signs of Change: Transformations of Christian Traditions and their Representation in the Arts, 1000–2000*, ed. Nils Holger Petersen, Claus Clüver, and Nicolas Bell (New York: Rodopi, 2004), 401–26 (406–08, 415–22).

38 Barbara Baert, *A Heritage of Holy Wood: The Legend of the True Cross in Text and Image* (Leiden: Brill, 2004); Charles Rohault de Fleury, *Mémoire sur les instruments de la passion de N.-S. J.-C.* (Paris: Lesort, 1870), 45–163; Natalia Teteriatnikov, "The Role of the Devotional Image in the Religious Life of Pre-Mongol Rus," in *Christianity and the Arts in Russia*, ed. William C. Brumfield and Milos M. Velimirovich (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1991), 30–45.

39 John Mandeville, *The Book of Marvels and Travels*, ed. Anthony Bale (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012), 8, 128.

40 Reginald Hyatte, *Laughter for the Devil: The Trials of Gilles de Rais, Companion-in-arms of Joan of Arc [1440]* (London: Associated University Presses, 1984), 74.

41 Darius Baronas and Stephen Christopher Rowell, *Conversion of Lithuania: From Pagan Barbarians to Late Medieval Christians* (Vilnius: Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore, 2015), 381.

and was told that the rulers of Europe had divided it up. Imperial ambassadors then went to Venice and in 1402 were given a piece. A century later (1509) the Ethiopian Empress Eleni (d. 1522) sent, via an Armenian ambassador, a portion of this piece as a gift to the king of Portugal. Another portion of it was gifted by Dawit II (ca. 1496–1540) to Pope Clement VII (1478–1534) in 1533.<sup>42</sup>

The importance of the cross to the Christian subcult motivated the development of a variety of traditions and theories. John Mandeville's *Travels* (ca. 1357–71) reported the tradition, localized in Greece, by which Adam's son Seth had placed four seeds from the forbidden-fruit tree under Adam's tongue before burying him; later, wood from the tree growing out of Adam's mouth would be used for the cross on which Jesus was crucified. Thus, in a deep-ken-satisfying way, the tree that had facilitated the first sin also produced the cross that had allowed for Jesus's sacrifice counter to sin. Mandeville also explained that the Jews chose rot-resistant cedar to extend the life of the cross and thus the suffering of Jesus, and fragrant cypress to shield passers-by from the smell of Jesus's decaying body. They used palm and olive to symbolize, respectively, victory (their victory over Jesus) and peace (the expected peace in their community when Jesus was no longer causing divisions).<sup>43</sup> Here, Mandeville was presenting what would be deep-ken information in a plain-ken context: these are symbolic resonances, but resonances understood to be in the minds of the historical Jews of the first century.

Jesus relics were less prominent in the Muslim subcult, perhaps due to their insistence on his non-divinity. One Islamic tradition did recognize that Jesus's sword had previously belonged to David, who used it to behead Goliath. Other prophets inherited the sword, which eventually came into the hands of Jesus. Its post-Jesus history was no less impressive. Muhammad came to own it, one of his many swords. This sword he called "sharp" (*al-Battar*) or "sword of the prophets," because of its previous owners, whose names were inscribed on it. One hundred one centimetres long, it is now part of the swords of Muhammad collected at the Topkapi museum. One tradition held that Jesus would again wield this sword, when he returns to fight the Antichrist.<sup>44</sup>

42 Sergew Hable-Selassie, "The Ge'ez Letters of Queen Eleni and Libne Dingil to John, King of Portugal," in *IV Congresso internazionale di studi etiopici*, ed. Enrico Cerulli, 2 vols. (Rome: Accademia nazionale dei Lincei, 1974), I, 554, 557; Kate Lowe, "'Representing' Africa: Ambassadors and Princes from Christian Africa to Renaissance Italy and Portugal, 1402–1608," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 17 (2007): 101–28 (123), <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0080440107000552>; Osvaldo Raineri, "I doni della Serenissima al re Davide I d'Etiopia (ms Raineri 43 della Vaticana)," *Orientalia christiana periodica* 65 (1999): 363–448.

43 Mandeville, *Book of Marvels*, 8–11.

44 (هجر للطباعة والنشر, 1992) محمد حسن محمد التهامي, سيوف الرسول وعدة حربه; Brannon Wheeler, *Mecca and Eden: Ritual, Relics, and Territory in Islam* (Chicago,

## Other Relics from the Jesus Narrative

Other Jesus relics were less immediately and physically linked to him, and instead took their significance from their role in his life story. The bones of one child murdered by Herod were interred at the foundation stone of the Bethlehem Chapel in Prague in 1394; the entire foot of another, labelled as such, was protected in an ornate 1450 reliquary.<sup>45</sup> John of Berry owned Joseph's engagement ring.<sup>46</sup> The Holy House, where the Annunciation and the Incarnation took place, had been miraculously moved from Nazareth to Loreto, Italy; by 1400, there was a Marian church at Loreto, but the details of the movement were uncertain. Pietro di Giorgio Tolomei of Teramo, the governor of the Loreto shrine from ca. 1450 to his 1463 death, wrote an account that included testimony (from 1296 or 1396) as well as a personal account from one Paolo di Rinalduccio (d. ca. 1448) whose great-great-grandfather saw the relocation happen.<sup>47</sup>

Perhaps the most tenuous Jesus relic was one that he never touched, but could have. Enthusiasts on Cyprus possessed, and touted, a jasper sarcophagus that *would have* been used to house Jesus's body, had he remained dead.<sup>48</sup> Similarly, a Jerusalem chapel wall included a stone that Jesus references as ready to "cry out" if he kept his disciples from praising him (Lk 19:40).<sup>49</sup> The logic that valued such a non-relic, if not driven by a desire to attract pilgrims, reflected a plain-ken logic that saw a world full of "might haves" and alternative possible histories.

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IL: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 39–40. See Sahih Muslim 2937a, "The Book of Tribulations and Portents of the Last Hour," *Sunnah*, <https://sunnah.com/muslim:2937a>

- 45 Foot reliquary, 1450 (inscription), Schweizerisches Landesmuseum, Zurich ("INTEGER PES DE INNOCENTIBUS"), <https://www.muensterschatz.ch/en/Fussreliquiar.html>; Andrej Abplanalp, "A Window on a Supernatural Helper," *National Museum Blog* (26 August 2017), <https://blog.nationalmuseum.ch/en/2017/08/a-window-on-a-supernatural-helper/>. See Timothy Husband, *The Treasury of Basel Cathedral* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2001), 118–19; Frank Welsh, *Battle for Christendom: The Council of Constance, the East-West Conflict, and the Dawn of Modern Europe* (Woodstock: Overlook Press, 2008), 108.
- 46 Raymond Cazelles and Johannes Rathofer, *Illuminations of Heaven and Earth: The Glories of the Très riches heures du duc de Berry* (New York: Abrams, 1988), 86.
- 47 Pietro Giorgio Tolomei, *Translatio miraculosa Ecclesie beatissime virginis Marie de Loreta* (Rome: Silber, 1509). See Ronald Lightbown, *Carlo Crivelli* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2004), 42–45; Karin Vélez, *The Miraculous Flying House of Loreto: Spreading Catholicism in the Early Modern World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780691184494>
- 48 Sigmund Feyerabend, *Reyßbuch deß heyligen Lands* (Frankfurt: Johann Feyerabend, 1584), 56v, 127v; George Jeffery, *A Description of the Historic Monuments of Cyprus* (Nicosia: Archer, 1918), 75–76.
- 49 Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *The Holy Land* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008), 73.

## Circulation and Accumulation

Many Jesus relics had complex histories. In the 1350s, a knight of Philip VI of France (1293–1350) gave a 4.4 m-long linen shroud to a church at Lirey, near Troyes, and a cult developed. The shroud's double negative imprint of a body suggested that this had been used to bury Jesus. Two successive bishops of that city attempted to suppress the developing cult, perhaps alarmed at the money it attracted away from their traditional revenue streams. One of these, Henri de Poitiers (d. 1370), launched an investigation, and theologians decided that it was fake because it was not mentioned in scripture. In 1418, the Lirey church gave the shroud to a nobleman for safe keeping. After his death, his widow in 1453 bartered it to Duchess Anne of Cyprus (1418–62), who, as daughter of the King of Jerusalem, likely had special interest in this Passion relic. In the sixteenth century, it was moved to Turin, which gave it its modern name, the Shroud of Turin.<sup>50</sup>

Other Jesus relics passed between the Muslim and Christian subcults. In 1492, Sultan Bayezid II (1447–1512) gifted Pope Innocent VIII (1432–92) with a Holy Lance, apparently in gratitude (or payment) for keeping his half-brother (and rival) Cem Sultan as a guest (or hostage) in Rome. The existence of the famous lance at Nuremberg cast doubt on its authenticity, and its provenance from the hands of the Ottoman Sultan cast doubt on its appropriateness, especially given its potential for triggering popular unrest. The papal advisers debated whether and how to have a procession through Rome to bring the relic to its new home. Should it be refused outright? Should they give out wine en route, to avoid a nightmare scenario where no one came out to welcome a relic regarded as fraudulent?<sup>51</sup> The consensus was to accept the gift, and then investigate whether it was the true (*verum*) lance. The entire enterprise went well: popular interest was widespread, and the lance proved its power by curing the deaf and the mute.<sup>52</sup>

In 1400, at Famagusta, Cyprus there was an earthenware amphora (a two-handled shipping-container vase, long in use in Mediterranean trade), 1.5 m tall, with handles too beautiful and weak to be actually used, with an Arabic inscription and painted decoration: the “Alhambra vase” (see Fig. 8.3). Scholars

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- 50 Andrea Nicolotti, *Sindone: Storia e leggende di una reliquia controversa* (Turin: Einaudi, 2015); Herbert Thurston, “The Holy Shroud and the Verdict of History,” *The Month* 101 (1903): 17–29 (22).
- 51 Johann Burchard, *Liber notarum*, ed. Enrico Celani, 2 vols. (Città di Castello: Lapi, 1906), I, 357–68.
- 52 Sigismondo De’ Conti, *Storie de’ suoi tempi*, 2 vols. (Florence: Barbèra, 1884), II, 28–29; Infessura, *Diario della città di Roma*, ed. Tommasini, 294. See Areford, “Multiplying the Sacred,” 131–35; Margaret Meserve, *Papal Bull: Print, Politics, and Propaganda in Renaissance Rome* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2021), 212–15, <https://doi.org/10.1353/book.85159>

today would locate its origins in fourteenth-century Islamicate Iberia, but in 1400 (or, at any rate, by 1512) it was known to have existed in the first century, when it held the water Jesus transformed into wine at Cana (Jn 2:6).<sup>53</sup>



Fig. 8.3 The Alhambra Vase, Nationalmuseum, Sweden, CC BY-SA 4.0, Linn Ahlgren / Nationalmuseum, <https://collection.nationalmuseum.se/eMP/eMuseumPlus?service=ExternalInterface&module=collection&objectId=37866>

The most important cult centres in the Far West accumulated many important Jesus relics. St. Chad's shrine at Lichfield included, in a 1345–16 inventory, "Some of Mount Calvary. Some of Golgotha... A piece of the rock standing upon which Jesus wept bitterly and wept over Jerusalem..." and, oddly juxtaposed, "some sardine oil."<sup>54</sup> Charles IV's (1316–78) relic collection included two thorns from the crown, the tablecloth from the Last Supper, Mary's breast-milk, and Mary Magdalene's breast.<sup>55</sup> For much of the century the imperial collection of relics at Nuremberg was displayed annually. A coloured woodcut from the 1487 *Heiltumsbüchlein* illustrates a child and two women using mirrors to collect some of those relics' power.<sup>56</sup> Santa Croce in Jerusalem had the *titulus*, the

53 Summer Kenesson, "Nasrid Lustre Pottery," *Muqarnas* 9 (1992): 93–115 (105–07); Otto Kurz, "The Strange History of an Alhambra Vase," *Al-Andalus* 40 (1975): 205–12; Diego de Mérida, "Viaje a Oriente [1512]," ed. Antonio Rodríguez Moñino, *Analecta Sacra Tarraconensia* 18 (1945): 115–87 (123).

54 J. Charles Cox, ed., *Catalogue of the Muniments and Manuscript Books Pertaining to the Dean and Chapter of Lichfield* (London: Harrison and Sons, 1886), 199–200, 209.

55 Welsh, *Battle for Christendom*, 105.

56 *Heilighumpuchlein: Wie das hochwürdigst Auch kaiserlich Heilighum vnd die grossen Römischen gnad darzu gegeben Alle Jaer außgerufft vnd geweiß wirdt in der*

sponge offered to him, Thomas's finger, two thorns, part of the true cross, and a nail. Ragusa Cathedral's treasury is an armoury of relics, including one of John the Baptist's hands, parts of the true cross, and Jesus's swaddling clothes in a silver chest.<sup>57</sup>

The greatest relic collector was Frederick III, the Wise (1463–1525), of Saxony, a grandson to Frederick II, the Gentle (1412–64), and a member of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre. Frederick, through his own pilgrimage and his purchasers' commercial efforts, assembled a vast set of relics, almost 20,000 in total. Lucas Cranach the Elder (ca. 1472–1553) made woodcuts illustrating 117 of his reliquaries. The prince-electors' stockpile included beard hair, eight thorns from the crown of thorns, myrrh and gold brought by Magi, straw and wood from Jesus's crib, a towel used to dry disciples' feet after Jesus washed them, Mary's milk, wood from the tree that bowed to Jesus in Egypt, a piece of Longinus's spear, particles from the place where Jesus's disciples hid from the Jews, a piece of the bread Jesus gave disciples after his Resurrection, and fragments from the cross, the clothing he wore while being flagellated, the stone from which he ascended into heaven, the Holy Sepulchre, the table from the Last Supper, a cross nail, and the Crucifixion sponge.<sup>58</sup> Pilgrims who came to Wittenberg to partake in the cult of these relics could have their post-mortem time in purgatory reduced by 1,902,202 years and 270 days, through a mechanism called an "indulgence."<sup>59</sup>

## Indulgences

Perhaps inspired by the fifteenth-century love of accumulation and inventories, the previous section might read like one blessed thing after another. Historians would like to know more about how Jesus objects were used, and what specific powers they had, than the sources tell us. Unfortunately, most of the pilgrims

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*lößlichen Stadt Nürnberg* (1487), Nürnberg, Staatsarchiv, Reichsstadt Nürnberg Handschriften 399a, fol. 4.

57 Robin Harris, *Dubrovnik: A History* (London: Saqi Books, 2006), 223.

58 Kathryn M. Rudy, *Rubrics, Images and Indulgences in Late Medieval Netherlandish Manuscripts* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 33, <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004326965>

59 Robert Bruck, *Friedrich der Weise als Förderer der Kunst* (Strassburg: Heitz and Mündel, 1903), 208–16; Hildegrad Zimmermann, *Lukas Cranach d. Ä. Folgen der Wittenberger Heiligtümer und die Illustrationen des Rhau'schen Hortulus animae* (Halle: Gebauer-Schwetschke, 1929); *Wittenberger Heiligtumsbuch* (Munich: Hirth, 1884 [1509]); Paul Kalkoff, *Abläss und Reliquienverehrung an der Schloßkirche zu Wittenberg unter Friedrich dem Weisen* (Gotha: Perthes, 1907), 50–66; Livia Cárdenas, *Friedrich der Weise und das Wittenberger Heiltumsbuch: Mediale Repräsentation zwischen Mittelalter und Neuzeit* (Berlin: Lukas, 2002), 19–24; Ernst Schulte-Strathaus, "Die Wittenberger Heiligtumsbücher von Jahre 1509 mit Holzschnitten von Lucas Cranach," *Gutenberg-Jahrbuch* 5 (1930): 175–86.

who used a mirror to save a relic's power and then returned home to apply it to a sick cow did not record the application, or the outcome; their concern was for present livestock not future historians. The one aspect of relics that sources address in abundance is the mechanics of indulgences.<sup>60</sup>

Every sin entailed a penalty, appropriate in degree to the gravity of the sin. Normally, that penalty was paid off by some pious activity, for example, fasting during Lent. Any penalties "unpaid" at the time of death would have to be worked off, far less comfortably, in purgatory, before the soul could enter heaven. Unlike in heaven and hell, time passed in purgatory, and passed painfully. Purgatorial sentences could last days, years, or millennia. Indulgences cancelled out these sentences. An indulgence was a kind of pardon issued by bishops for the remission of a penalty incurred by the sinner. By this mechanism, the Church transferred some of the merit earned by Jesus, or by some saint, to the sinner who had performed a specified action.

The practice was justified in terms of the canon,<sup>61</sup> and theorized in terms of a redistribution of the vast leftover merit from Jesus's Passion that had gone into an infinite "treasury of merit" under Church control. Only valid after the sinner had felt regret and undergone a formal confession, the indulgence was a kind of restitution also thought to make the sinner less likely to offend in the future. An indulgence document typically specified terms and conditions, and was authorized by the seals of the various bishops involved.

The power of an indulgence was quantified in terms of time. Theologians disagreed on whether those time measurements represented time spent during life in penance or rather time spent after death in purgatory. The twelfth century saw a shift from fractional quantities (e.g., one third of existing penalty) to absolute quantities (e.g., ten years). Note that fractional calculations had been done in iterations: if you had twenty-seven years' penalty, and an indulgence removed a third of that, the first application of the indulgence reduced the penalty to eighteen years, the second removed a third of that new balance (so six years, with the new balance at twelve), and the third removed a third of that new balance (so four years), with the final balance at eight. In contrast, the new method with absolute quantities was less complicated and, in one explanation, *discretius* [more discrete]—a complex adjective that could mean

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60 Walter Gibson, "Prayers and Promises: The Interactive Indulgence Print in the Later Middle Ages," in *Push Me, Pull You: Imaginative, Emotional, Physical, and Spatial Interaction in Late Medieval and Renaissance Art*, ed. Sarah Blick and Laura D. Gelfand (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 277–324, [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004215139\\_009](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004215139_009); R. N. Swanson, ed., *Promissory Notes on the Treasury of Merits: Indulgences in Late Medieval Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047410522>

61 Mt 16:18; Jn 20:23.



either prudent or disconnected, like integers with separated and distinct values. A contemporary commentator likened the new indulgence-calculation system to the way a king paid his mercenaries.<sup>62</sup>

Each indulgence was linked to an action required to earn the indulgence, and such action varied widely. Pilgrims visiting a relic could get an indulgence linked to that relic. On a 1486 pilgrimage to Jerusalem, Konrad Grünemberg (d. 1494) kept a journal recording the indulgences he collected, using a cross T to mark the locations where he acquired them, such as the Golden Gate of Palm Sunday.<sup>63</sup> Attending a mass or participating in a procession could earn an indulgence. They could be “purchased” with prayers, or with money, or both. Indulgences were offered for acts of charity, for the “protection” of Christendom (as through a crusade), for the establishment and refurbishment of churches, and for the construction and maintenance of transportation infrastructure, valuable for its potential to decrease travellers’ swearing.<sup>64</sup> Voicing the name of Jesus after completing such a good work allowed for an indulgence of ten or twenty days.<sup>65</sup> Members of one confraternity at Assisi earned forty days’ indulgence each time they began a meeting by intoning, “Jesus Christ be Praised.”<sup>66</sup> Reciting the prayers known as the Fifteen Os every day for a year sprung fifteen souls out of purgatory.<sup>67</sup> In 1391, Boniface IX announced that anyone who had a valid excuse for not attending the 1390 Jubilee in Rome could obtain the same indulgence won by an attendee: after giving a sincere confession, visit four churches in Liège and remit directly to the papacy all the money that the would-be pilgrim saved by not travelling all the way to Rome. In 1514–15, Pope Leo X (1475–1521) and Emperor Charles V (1500–58) worked out an agreement on sharing proceeds for an indulgence, one third for the construction of St. Peter’s in Rome, and two thirds for the construction of anti-flooding dykes in the Netherlands.<sup>68</sup>

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62 Robert W. Shaffern, “The Medieval Theology of Indulgences,” in Swanson, ed., *Promissory Notes*, 11–36 (23–24), [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047410522\\_003](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047410522_003). We might also associate the old ratios with deep-ken and the new absolute quantities with plain-ken measurement.

63 Andrea Denke, *Konrad Grünbergs Pilgerreise ins Heilige Land 1486* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2011), 251.

64 Shaffern, “Medieval Theology,” 17–18.

65 For an example of a twenty-day indulgence, see BodL MS Lat. liturg. e. 17. See Swanson, “Praying for Pardon,” in Swanson, ed., *Promissory Notes*, 215–40 (229), [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047410522\\_010](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047410522_010)

66 Francesco Santucci, ed., “Statuto della fraternita dei disciplinati di S. Lorenzo,” in *Le fraternite medievali di Assisi*, ed. Ugolino Nicolini, Enrico Menestò, and Francesco Santucci (Assisi: Accademia Properziana del Subasio, 1989), 217–304 (300).

67 BodL MS Lyell 30, fol. 41v–43r.

68 Eugène Bacha, ed., *La chronique liégeoise de 1402* (Brussels: Kiessling, 1900), 419–20; Paul Frédéricq, *Codex documentorum sacratissimarum indulgentiarum neerlandicarum* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1922), 23–24; Charles M. A. Caspers, “Indulgences in the

In the fourteenth century, indulgences began to be used for the dead. This was debated by theologians, but, in 1476, Pope Sixtus IV (1414–84) officially issued an indulgence for both the living and the dead.<sup>69</sup> This was an attractive, affordable alternative for the mass for the dead—so direct a competition that Church officials feared it would cut into the market for masses.<sup>70</sup>

Given the huge quantity of Jesus's merit that the Church had access to, as well as unscrupulous salesmen who could make unauthorized promises, the total volume of claimed remissions sky-rocketed. By the fifteenth century, indulgences often had tens of thousands of days linked to them.<sup>71</sup> A century later, one English indulgence, claiming authorization from John XXII (1244–1334), and tied to the Holy Cross, for saying three prayers promised "ten hundred thousand Years of Pardon."<sup>72</sup> Others offered days or years equal to the number of gravel stones in the ocean, the number of raindrops on a rainy day, or the number of grain-sheaves or grass-blades that grow during the Easter season.<sup>73</sup> Praying before one image of the instruments used to torture Jesus offered up 6755.5 years and 3 days.<sup>74</sup> Reciting a given prayer before the Veil of Veronica (ca. 1482) would offer so many days' remission "that I could not hardly conceive."<sup>75</sup> Plausibility was the only limit. Those quantities often had deep-ken meaning, either through large round numbers or through consonance with natural or Biblical imagery. Some indulgences gave a number of years equal to the number of Christ's wounds, with 6666 being a frequent count of them.<sup>76</sup> Even an ugly number, and thus oriented to the plain ken, like "6755.5 years and 3 days," was possibly the result of adding together more obviously deep-ken figures.

We can take a closer look at a booklet of prayers and indulgences published in Augsburg in 1515, the *Jubilacio Anime* [The Soul's Joy]. A complete statement of an indulgence links the action to three variables: the number of bishops authorizing it, and the magnitude of the indulgence expressed in years, and/or

Low Countries, c. 1300–c. 1520," in Swanson, ed., *Promissory Notes*, 65–99 (73–74, 84–85), [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047410522\\_005](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047410522_005)

69 Craig M. Koslofsy, *The Reformation of the Dead: Death and Ritual in Early Modern Germany, 1450–1700* (New York: St. Martin's, 2000), 26.

70 Christine Göttler, "Is Seeing Believing? The Use of Evidence in Representations of the Miraculous Mass of Saint Gregory," *The Germanic Review* 76 (2001): 121–42 (133), <https://doi.org/10.1080/00168890109601550>

71 Gibson, "Prayers," 321.

72 Johann Erhard Kapp, *Sammlung einiger zum Päpstlichen Ablass...gehörigen Schriften* (Leipzig: Martini, 1721), 511.

73 Rudy, *Rubrics*, 37; Diana Webb, "Pardons and Pilgrims," in Swanson, ed., *Promissory Notes*, 241–75 (247–48), [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047410522\\_011](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047410522_011)

74 John B. Friedman, *Northern English Books, Owners and Makers in the Late Middle Ages* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1995), 171–73, 331.

75 Reproduced in Parshall, *Origins of European Printmaking*, 241 (cat. no. 71).

76 Rudy, *Rubrics*, 44.

in days. The *Jubilacio* indulgences have authorizations ranging up to 138 bishops (fol. 22r), an ugly number with plain-ken force. One set of indulgences in it specified values for doing different things with respect to the name of Jesus: saying it (140 days), bowing at it (5 years, 20 days), looking at it (5 years), and beating the heart (300 days).<sup>77</sup> Consider three year-day totals, and how they look from the two kens:

| FOL. | YEARS  | DAYS   | COMMENT  |
|------|--------|--------|--|
| 22v  | 33,000 | 40     | This indulgence has deep-ken power in both numbers: 33,000 is the number of Jesus's years(!) on earth, times 10 <sup>3</sup> , while 40 days is the number of days he spent in the desert, and thus the number of days in Lent.                        |
| 18v  | 3      | 15,860 | This duration might have been expressed as, roughly, 43 years and 154 days, but 3 has more deep-ken strength than 43, and 15860 has more plain-ken strength than 154. Note that numbers of days greater than 365 are not typically converted to years. |
| 19r  | 40,024 | 96     | Here, 40024 is attractive to the plain ken, but perhaps is the sum of two numbers attractive to the deep ken, 40,000 and 24. The 96 days adds precision; the total is equal to, approximately, 40024.26 years. <sup>78</sup>                           |

Table 8.1 Examples of Indulgence Periods in the *Jubilacio Anime*.

The printing press allowed for mass, and therefore economical, production of indulgences, usually with an image, a prayer, and a promise.<sup>79</sup> Johann Geiler von Kayserberg (1445–1510) explained how to behave before such images, sold for a penny apiece: “Then show yourself to them [the saints depicted on the images] in outward respect, kiss the image on the paper, kneel down before it!”<sup>80</sup> A similar indulgence offers viewers who say five paternosters and five Ave Marias an indulgence of forty years and one hundred and forty days through

77 The German verbs are *nennen*, *naigen*, *anplicken*, *klopfenn ans herze*. *Jubilacio Anime* (Augsburg: n.p., 1515), fol. 27v–28r.

78 Note that all these numbers are given in Roman numerals, so this is “xl thousand xxiii year and xlvi day.” Perhaps xxiii is even uglier than 24. I would think xlvi is also highly ugly, with four units, not in order of magnitude, but can see the contrary argument.

79 Nikolaus Paulus, *Geschichte des Ablasses im Mittelalter*, 3 vols. (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1923), III, 294–96.

80 Otto Clemen, *Die Volksfrömmigkeit des ausgehenden Mittelalters* (Dresden: C. Ludwigg Ungelenk, 1937), 14.

the authority of four popes and forty bishops.<sup>81</sup> Prayers before images such as the Arma Christi, the Gregory the Great mass, and the various Veronica icons could trigger the remission of thousands of years of punishment.<sup>82</sup> One ca. 1450 woodcut of the Crucifixion, painted with red to show off the volume of blood, under the caption “*ecce homo*” has a prayer to the Sacred Heart that promised an 80,000-year remission.<sup>83</sup>

Few critics objected fundamentally to the practice of indulgences, although many denounced serious abuses of it. The popular understanding underwent a shift regarding what an indulgence could accomplish: where once it was a mere remission of penance, increasingly there arose a more optimistic, and ungrounded, expectation that it allowed sinners to sin freely, without remorse or consequence. Scholars attempted, without much success, to curb indulgence inflation. Jean Gerson (1363–1429) repeatedly denounced “certain fatuous and superstitious” indulgences, such as 20,000-year remission for reciting the paternoster before an image.<sup>84</sup> The difficulty in verifying indulgences allowed for fraud, a dangerous deceit: in 1481, hoodwinked locals in Kampen beheaded a man for selling fake indulgences. Even writers in the Modern Devotion movement, never shy about criticizing Church practices contrary to how they understood Jesus’s message, accepted the basic mechanism of a contrite sinner purchasing a reduction of time in purgatory.<sup>85</sup>

The indulgence practice was thus a man-made system to take advantage of a “natural” resource, Jesus’s merit. It was not renewable, but it was infinite. Why should Church officials drawing from an infinite treasury set any numbers? Perhaps the apparent randomness suggested, in the plain ken, authenticity. Numbers might have been chosen to maximize participation and overall salvation—to encourage greater piety by priming the pump.

## Cross Cult

The cross’s importance propelled the spread of cross relics, replications, and representations across a vast geography—throughout the Christian subcult’s geography, so most of the Far West and some of the Near West, and even in the Core—as they were adapted locally into a wide-ranging diversity (see Chapter 7). Crosses were prominent in partly converted Lithuania by 1400, and

81 The Mass of St. Gregory (ca. 1470–95), British Museum, London, [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P\\_1850-0713-16](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1850-0713-16)

82 Sixten Ringbom, *Icon to Narrative: The Rise of the Dramatic Close-Up in Fifteenth Century Devotional Painting* (Doornspijk: Davaco Publishers, 1984), 25–26.

83 Crucifixion, middle fifteenth century, woodcut, Cambridge University Library, GBR/0012/MS Add.5944/11.

84 Ringbom, *Icon to Narrative*, 24.

85 Caspers, “Indulgences,” 68, 78–81.

by the seventeenth century had become the national symbol.<sup>86</sup> Crosses, or their metalwork, were featured conspicuously in the naves, right before the altar, of Georgian churches; these, often plated with gold and decorated with gospel images, were a unique feature in Georgian art.<sup>87</sup> Ivan the Great (1440–1505) erected a huge cross at the top of the main dome of the Moscow Kremlin. Novgorod, 500 km away, had church domes that historians have described as taking “the form of a military helmet crowned by a cross.”<sup>88</sup> The Armenian *khachkars* were rectangular slabs with the crosses carved in relief. The lattices of Ethiopian crosses, the knots of Celtic crosses, and the floral adornments of Armenian crosses, while retaining distinctive identities, shared a complexity. Some have speculated that these complexities did not develop independently of one another, and, perhaps in the centuries before our period, missionaries from Armenia had brought them to Ireland.<sup>89</sup> Perhaps Armenian missionaries also brought them to Ethiopia, which is closer to Armenia than Ireland is.

Particularly visible were the large outdoor crosses that dotted the Christian landscape. By 1400, there were enough crosses and steeples, some visible ten miles at sea, to make compasses redundant until the sixteenth century: a knowledgeable pilot could navigate using steeples.<sup>90</sup> Across the Christian zone, large outdoor crosses marked locations for preaching (“preaching crosses”) or trade (“market crosses”). They were erected as memorials for the dead, or for victories in battle. They are still known today as *Betkreuz* [prayer-cross] in German. At the western edge of the Far West, we see the Bristol High Cross (ca. 1373), or the fifteenth-century market cross of Bishops Lydeard, Somerset.<sup>91</sup> The Bristol cross, then or soon gilded and painted, marked the location of executions and blacksmith trade.<sup>92</sup> The so-called Eleanor Crosses blazoned a thirteenth-century funeral route from Lincoln to London. At the other extreme, in Kerala in the Indian Core, we see large outdoor crosses made of stone. There, in 1348–39, the Franciscan Giovanni de’ Marignolli (fl. 1338–53) had erected just such a cross, but broke with tradition in adding papal arms to it. He anointed it with oil, perhaps following a local custom, perhaps importing or inventing a

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86 Kevin O’Connor, *Culture and Customs of the Baltic States* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2006), 229.

87 Soltes, *National Treasures*, 108–09, 116.

88 Georgy Petrovich Fedotov, *The Russian Religious Mind: Kievan Christianity, the Tenth to the Thirteenth Centuries* (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), 353.

89 A. E. Redgate, *The Armenians* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 242–43.

90 Eric Christiansen, *The Northern Crusades* (London: Penguin Books, 1997), 13.

91 Charles Pooley, *An Historical and Descriptive Account of the Old Stone Crosses of Somerset* (London: Longmans, Green, 1877).

92 M. J. H. Liversidge, *The Bristol High Cross* (Bristol: Bristol Branch of the Historical Association, 1978), 9.

new one.<sup>93</sup> In 1502, a Crucifixion statue was erected in Orléans, with Charles VII (1403–61) and Joan of Arc kneeling on either side.<sup>94</sup>

Such outdoor crosses often served as the setting for sermons. In February 1413, a foreign, unknown preacher in Wigston, England, ordered by the chaplain to stop preaching in the church, told the parishioners he would preach at the cross outside. The parishioners asked him to stay, because it was too cold out.<sup>95</sup> Cardinal Bessarion (1403–72) theorized the relationship between cross and sermon. In his instruction to his crusade preachers (1463), he valued the cross for its ability to inspire the faithful to military victory, as a reflection of its soteriological power. He traced its history back to the tenth plague of Egypt (Exodus 12) when it was used to mark in lamb's blood the houses of the Israelites so that their first-born would not be killed in God's wrath.<sup>96</sup> Thus, the Cardinal created a chain of tradition to justify the cross as something more than a mere symbol, but found its ancestor in another symbol.

The abstracted symbol of the cross had a variety of uses, for authentication, navigation, and military technology. By the fifteenth century, some people not literate enough to sign their own names, such as Africans visiting Portugal, would simply make the mark of the cross. Some merchants used stylized crosses to brand their wares.<sup>97</sup> The Catalan map of 1375, based apparently on earlier materials, noted Christian kingdoms in India, one near Colombo (Quilon), one near Deogiri (Daulatabad), where it placed a cross with double horizontal bar (see Fig. 8.4). Joan of Arc's sword was enhanced by five crosses.<sup>98</sup> Cultists

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- 93 Carlo G. Cereti, Luca M. Olivieri, and Joseph Vazhuthanapally, "The Problem of the Saint Thomas Crosses and Related Questions," *East and West* 52 (2002): 285–310, <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/29757546>; Iain Gardner, S. N. C. Lieu, and K. Parry, ed., *From Palmyra to Zayton: Epigraphy and Iconography* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), 238–39; Achim Timmermann, *Memory and Redemption: Public Monuments and the Making of Late Medieval Landscape* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017).
- 94 Nora M. Heimann, "The Princess and the Maid of Orléans: Sculpting Spirituality During the July Monarchy," in *Joan of Arc and Spirituality*, ed. Ann W. Astell and Bonnie Wheeler (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 229–47 (235–36), [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-06954-2\\_13](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-06954-2_13)
- 95 Lincolnshire Archives MS Vj-O, fol. 22. See Ian Forrest, *The Detection of Heresy in Late Medieval England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 218–19, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199286928.001.0001>
- 96 Norman Hously, ed. and trans., *Documents on the Later Crusades, 1274–1580* (London: MacMillan Press, 1996), 147; Ludwig Mohler, ed., "Bessarions Instruktion für die Kreuzzugspredigt in Venedig (1463)," *Römische Quartalschrift* 35 (1927): 337–40 (339).
- 97 Examples are on the inn signs of Bicci di Lorenzo's painting *Saint Nicholas Resuscitating Three Youths*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/435669>
- 98 Pierre Champion, ed., *Procès de condamnation de Jeanne d'Arc*, 3 vols. (Paris: E. Champion, 1920–21), II, 50–51, 140–41; Régine Pernoud, *Joan of Arc by Herself and*

at Rhodes honoured a cross made out of the water vessel Jesus used to wash the feet of a disciple.<sup>99</sup> Other saints could use the abstracted cross symbol, thus infusing it with their own authority. The vegetarian Francis of Paola (1416–1507) used the sign of the cross to instantly cook vegetables. Jesus’s mother Mary had given a cross made of vines, with a distinctive drooping horizontal, to the fourth-century Saint Nino, a key woman in the evangelization of Georgia. Nino bound the vines with strands of her own hair, creating what became known as the grapevine cross, now in the Sioni Cathedral in Tbilisi.<sup>100</sup>

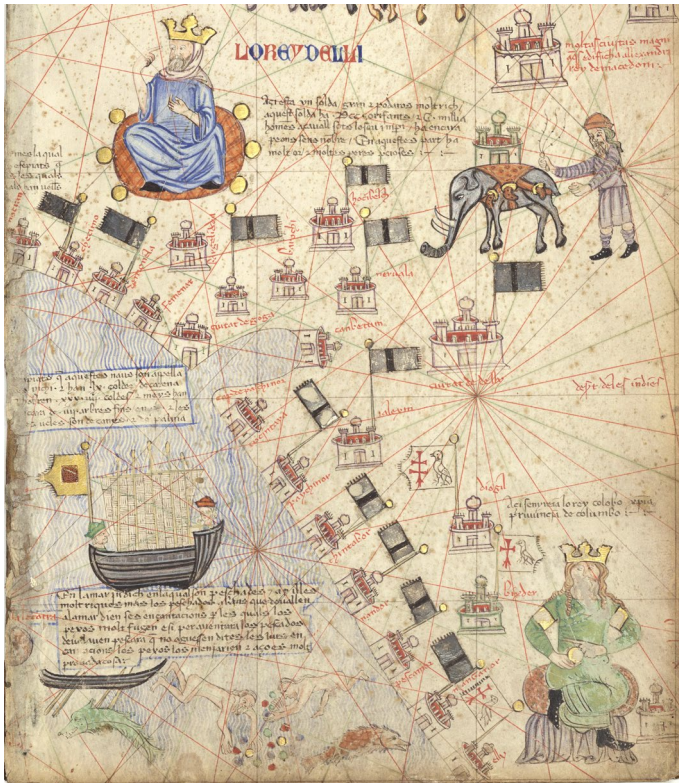


Fig. 8.4 Detail from Cresques Abraham, *Atlas Catalan* (1375), BnF, Espagnol 30. Wikimedia, public domain, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sultan\\_of\\_Delhi\\_\(top\)\\_and\\_King\\_of\\_Vijayanagar\\_\(bottom\)\\_in\\_the\\_Catalan\\_Atlas\\_of\\_1375.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sultan_of_Delhi_(top)_and_King_of_Vijayanagar_(bottom)_in_the_Catalan_Atlas_of_1375.jpg)

*Her Witnesses* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1962), 68–69.

99 William Wey, *The Itineraries of William Wey* (London: Nichols, 1857), 52.

100 Nino Ghambashidze, “Vine and Woman—One of the Cardinal Symbols of Georgian Identity (Ethnological Research),” *Sociology Study* 7 (2017): 285–91, <https://doi.org/DOI: 10.17265/2159-5526/2017.05.006>

Crosses also served as prominent symbols of rulers and their ruled. Today thirteen flags of European sovereign states, as well as ten extra-European states, have the cross shape in its own right, and five more feature crowns topped with crosses. Like the evolution of the states themselves, the evolution of these crosses was slow and complex; some of their origins are modern, others obscure, perhaps in the crusades. In our period, crosses stood on banners, on coins, and on or near coats of arms. At this time, a handful of crosses solidified their identities as symbols of lords and proto-nations. In 1385, Scotland's parliament ordered Scottish soldiers to bear the cross of St. Andrew.<sup>101</sup> The late-fourteenth-century *Gelre Armorial* features dozens of crosses in its collection of arms, including those of Denmark, and the Trier and Cologne archbishops.<sup>102</sup>

Crosses had varying degrees of prominence. Some could be hard to forget: Ethiopians branded three crosses into their foreheads (the practice was documented in 1509, and we saw it on the forehead of one of our guides there in 2011).<sup>103</sup> On 17 January 1510, before dawn, a fiery apparition, a mile high and half a mile wide, blasted a hill village just north of Ragusa with lightning, and then took the form of a fiery cross, the size of two crossed galleys, persisting until sunrise. The air filled with crosses. A few weeks later, 100 km to the northwest, in the Croatian ghetto of Hvar, a crucifix bled from its wounds, and was brought in procession to the cathedral. The next day, the roof of the church next door to the house where the crucifix had bled collapsed. These events were interpreted as divine disapproval of the Venetian elite's treatment of Indigenous Croatians, who began a four-year rebellion.<sup>104</sup> Less famous crosses remained forgotten throughout our period. Some processional-cross heads were made around 1400 in England, but throughout most of our period remained lost in Hereford Cathedral's central tower's vault, where they were eventually discovered among some 250 cartloads of rubbish.<sup>105</sup>

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101 Edinburgh, National Records of Scotland, Liber Niger, PA5/4, fol. 71rv.

102 *Gelre Armorial*, Brussels, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, MS 15652-56, fol. 32r, 48v, 55v. A cross's referent was not necessarily immediately Jesus, but could also be the associated saint who fought under it, such as George, or died on it, such as Andrew.

103 Francis M. Rogers, *The Quest for Eastern Christians: Travels and Rumor in the Age of Discovery* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1962), 126-27.

104 Speratus Nodilo, ed., *Annales Ragusini Anonymi item Nicolai de Ragnina* (Zagreb: Academia Scientiarum et Artium, 1883), 94.

105 Francis T. Havergal, *Fasti Herefordenses* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1869), 146; John Merewether, *A Statement of the Condition and Circumstances of the Cathedral Church of Hereford* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, 1842), 20-21.



## Charms and Amulets

Beyond relics, some more ordinary objects in the Jesus cult were infused with power through their design and application.<sup>106</sup> In the fifteenth century, the English word “charm” referred to words or deeds that had supernatural power. Such power was so closely associated with physical things that, a century later, “charm” came to also refer to objects that produced charms. In the nineteenth century, the transfer of meaning was complete, and one could refer to a “charm bracelet” without any implication of magic. This chapter follows modern scholarly English to refer to these objects as “charms” or “amulets”—the latter a seventeenth-century word that has not yet lost its magical connotations.

We can look at some English Jesus charm scrolls, created throughout the fifteenth century and used, in particular, for childbirth. These were written in the vernacular, except for more critical words, which were written in Latin. Such a scroll’s power could be used by looking at it, or by carrying it on one’s person, or, in the case of a woman in labour, by laying it across her body. Some passages have been rubbed beyond legibility, indicating frequent use. Their technology was measurement: one scroll, probably used as a childbirth girdle by Queen Elizabeth of York (1466–1503), wife to King Henry VII (1457–1509), with a prominent IHS, enumerated the drops of blood Jesus spilled.<sup>107</sup> Another had the same length as Jesus’s body.<sup>108</sup> Others featured images of scale drawings of a cross at one-fifteenth of Jesus’s height, and the Crucifixion nails and side wound at a 1:1 scale (see Fig. 8.5). The advertised promises varied, but beyond safe childbirth usually included protection against weapons, fire, water, disease, evil spirits, false judgment, and false witness. With their power, one could

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- 106 Chiara Benati, “À la guerre comme à guerre but with Caution: Protection Charms and Blessings in the Germanic Tradition,” *Brathair* 17 (2017): 155–91 (175–76); Curt F. Bühler, “Prayers and Charms in Certain Middle English Scrolls,” *Speculum* 39 (1964): 270–80 (277); Margaret Healy, “Wearing Powerful Words and Objects: Healing Prosthetics,” *Textual Practice* 30 (2016): 1233–51, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0950236X.2016.1229905>; Rosanne Hebing, “‘Allmygti god this lettyr sent’: English Heavenly Letter Charms in Late Medieval Books and Rolls,” *Studies in Philology* 114 (2017): 720–47, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/sip.2017.0027>; Gustavo Uzielli, *Le misure lineari medioevali e l’effigie di Cristo* (Florence: Seeber, 1899); Don C. Skemer, *Binding Words: Textual Amulets in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, PA: Penn State UP, 2006), 263–64; Kathryn M. Rudy, “Kissing Images, Unfurling Rolls, Measuring Wounds, Sewing Badges and Carrying Talismans,” *Electronic British Library Journal* (2011), article 5.
- 107 Wellcome Library, MS 632. Bühler, “Prayers and Charms,” 274; Walter J. Dilling, *Girdles: Their Origin and Development* (Glasgow: Macdougall, 1914), 43; *Privy Purse Expenses of Elizabeth of York*, ed. Nicholas Harris Nicolas (London: Pickering, 1830), 78, 197–98; S. A. J. Moorat, *Catalogue of Western Manuscripts on Medicine and Science in the Wellcome Historical Medical Library*, 2 vols. (London: Wellcome Historical Medical Library, 1962), I, 491–93.
- 108 BL Harley Roll Ch 43 A 14.

avoid dying suddenly in a state of sin without having received the sacraments. Henry VII's prayer roll, over three meters long, included a number of prayers and images, and a cross that could be multiplied to find Jesus's height, and a measure of the side wound.<sup>109</sup>



Fig. 8.5 Instruments of the Passion, British Library, London, Harley Roll T 11.  
 © The British Library Board, [https://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=harley\\_roll\\_t\\_11\\_f001r](https://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=harley_roll_t_11_f001r)

109 BL Add. MS 88929. See David S. Areford, "The Passion Measured: A Late-Medieval Diagram of the Body of Christ," in *The Broken Body: Passion Devotion in Late-Medieval Culture*, ed. A. A. MacDonald, H. N. B. Ridderbos, and R. M. Schlusemann (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1998), 211–38 (225–26); Benati, "À la guerre," 175–76; Hebing, "Allmygti god this lettyr sent," 733–40.

One set of textual amulets were understood to be “heavenly letters,” letters sent from God.<sup>110</sup> One from 1500, offering protection against weapons, begins with German, elevates to Latin, switches to Greek, and then returns to German before ending with the names of the Magi between cross symbols.<sup>111</sup> Another letter, prescribing the saying of five paternosters,<sup>112</sup> and another, inviting the user to take the Trinity as a mantle,<sup>113</sup> give protection against fire, drowning, false judgment, and heartbreak. The latter helpfully advises that to be effective the letter can be either read or heard. A late-fifteenth-century golden ring has engravings of the five wounds, which were originally filled with red enamel. The interior inscription reads, “the five wounds of God are my blessed medicine / the cross and passion of Christ are medicines to me.” The power is enhanced by the names of the three kings and the words “tetragrammaton” (YHWH) and “ananyzapta.” The latter may be an acronym for *Antidotum Nazareni Auferat Necem Intoxicationis Sanctificet Alimenta Pocula Trinitas Alma* [May the antidote of the Nazarene prevent death by poisoning and may the Holy Trinity bless my food and drink].<sup>114</sup>

Amulets’ promises were powerful. One charm defends against all weapons forged after the birth of Jesus.<sup>115</sup> A fifteenth century text invokes the cross as a protection, to defeat swords and to shield against enemies.<sup>116</sup> A French amulet of the side wound was unisex, but offered different protections for women (safe birth) and men (against enemies and sudden death).<sup>117</sup> A ca. 1500 Irish manuscript with Jesus’s body measurements explains that on the day you see those numbers you would not suddenly die, the devil would not harm you, and “Jesus would be kind to you.”<sup>118</sup>

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110 Skemer, *Binding*, 96–105.

111 D. Imesch, “Zwei alte Besegnungen,” *Schweizerisches Archiv für Volkskunde* 4 (1900): 340–41. See Adolf Jacoby, “Heilige Längenmasse: Eine Untersuchung zur Geschichte der Amulette,” *Schweizerisches Archiv für Volkskunde* 29 (1929), 1–17 (11).

112 Imesch, “Zwei alte Besegnungen,” 341; Jacoby, “Heilige Längenmasse,” 7.

113 Anton E. Schönbach, “Altdeutsche Funde aus Innsbruck,” *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur* 33 (1889): 339–94 (393–94).

114 British Museum, AF.897 (fifteenth century), British Museum, London, [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H\\_AF-897](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_AF-897). See Werner Karl, “Ananizapta und der Middleham Jewel,” *Sammelblatt des Historischen Vereins Ingolstadt* 110 (2001): 57–74.

115 Extract in Verena Holzmann, *Ich beswer dich wurm vnd wyrm: Formen und Typen altdeutscher Zaubersprüche und Segen* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2001), 267.

116 Benati, “À la guerre,” 170; Holzmann, *Ich beswer dich*, 264–65.

117 David S. Areford, “Reception,” *Studies in Iconography* 33 (2012): 73–88 (80).

118 BodL MS Rawl. B. 512, fol. 52v. See Kuno Meyer, “Die Leibeslänge Christi,” *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 10 (1915): 398–402 (401–02).

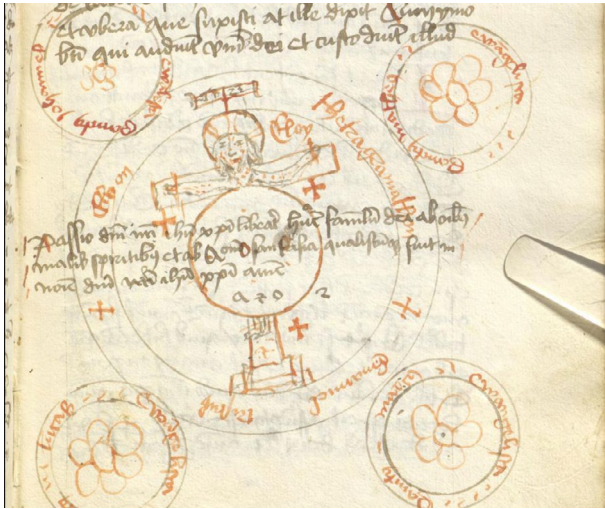


Fig. 8.6 Exorcism diagram, *Rituale exorcismorum*, Frankfurt am Main, Universitätsbibliothek, MS lat. oct. 113, fol. 55r. Digitized by the J. C. Senckenberg University Library Frankfurt am Main (2013), urn:nbn:de:hebis:30:2-46299, public domain, <https://sammlungen.ub.uni-frankfurt.de/msma/content/pageview/4935701>

How did these work? Passages from canon were often a key component. In 1:1–14, a description of high Christology, and Lk 11:27–28, an epilogue to an exorcism, were common texts in amulets. Carrying some Books of Hours, according to explanations noted in those books themselves, was apotropaic.<sup>119</sup> An illustration in an exorcism manual, after a gospel passage in which Jesus casts out demons (Lk 11), shows how to draw appropriate circles on the ground for the ritual, and includes a Crucifixion alongside powerful names of God and the evangelists, and alpha and omega (see Fig. 8.6).<sup>120</sup> Some charms worked through consonance between a moment in Jesus's life and the effect desired in the present. One could make a sword harmless by three times invoking the Trinity and telling it to be as gentle as Mary was towards Baby Jesus. Other charms allowed the user to escape from captivity by invoking Jesus's escaping from

119 Alp.[honse] Aymar, "Le sachet accoucheur et ses mystères," *Annales du Midi* 38 (1926): 315–17, 323–24; Paul Saenger, "Books of Hours and Reading Habits of the Later Middle Ages," in *The Culture of Print: Power and the Uses of Print in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Roger Chartier, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1989), 141–73 (147, 156, 173); D. C. Skemer, "Amulet Rolls and Female Devotion in the late Middle Ages," *Scriptorium* 55 (2001): 197–27 (212), <https://doi.org/10.3406/scrip.2001.1929>

120 *Rituale exorcismorum*, Frankfurt am Main, Universitätsbibliothek, MS lat. oct. 113, fol. 55r.

imprisonment, as when he ascended to heaven.<sup>121</sup> One Latin amulet roll from early-fifteenth-century France invoked Longinus to staunch the flow of blood. One charm (1475) specified, in English, that to be effective you should bind it to a woman in labour; the words themselves, left in Latin, included statements that Mary gave birth to Jesus, Anne gave birth to Mary, and Elizabeth gave birth to John the Baptist, with each statement visually separated from the next with a cross symbol. Other amuletic devices required kisses to be activated.<sup>122</sup>

Sometimes the physical scripture itself worked as an amulet. Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406) wrote about Qur’anic amulets in the Islamic world. Surah 112 appeared throughout our period on amulets, and remained visible on the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. One doorway in east Africa had half of the Qur’an written on either side of it; thus, those who entered must pass through the Qur’an, which acted as a kind of guard. Passers-through did not need to read it to enjoy its protection. One Qur’anic word was taken out of context with its apotropaic meaning intact: Qur’an 2:137 includes one of the longest words of the Qur’an: فَسَيَكْفِيكَهُمُ *fasayakfikahum*, meaning “will thus be sufficient for you against them.” The context is a promise that if Christians turn away from Islamic beliefs, then God “will suffice [or ‘protect’] you against them.” The ‘Abbasid dynasty was fond of this word, and it became something like an amulet itself, appearing by itself on objects throughout the fourteenth century.<sup>123</sup>

The physical gospels, often in conjunction with crucifixes, had the power to guarantee contrition or promises. On Good Friday in 1426, the former heretic John Walcote of Hazelton was readmitted to the Church in Worcester Cathedral. He kissed the gospels, then with bare feet and head crawled around the cathedral after a crucifix held by two monks, kissing it when they stopped the circuit. In Ireland, oaths, whether for general promises, or to secure specific contractual obligations, such as the exchange of land for military service, would be sworn on the cross or on the gospels. If the cross or gospels were not sufficient, the oath could be supported by threats of interdict and excommunication, and a hostage

121 Medellägtysk läkebok, Stockholm, Kungliga Biblioteket, MS X 113, fol. 34v, 48r; Heidelberg, Universitätsbibliothek, Cod. Pal. germ. 163, fol. 144v. See Benati, “À la guerre,” 160–65.

122 Areford, “Reception,” 78–82; John Brand, *Observations on Popular Antiquities* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1900), 332; Skemer, “Amulet,” 226.

123 Sheila S. Blair, “Written, Spoken, Envisioned: The Many Facets of the Qur’an in Art,” in *Word of God, Art of Man: The Qur’an and its Creative Expressions*, ed. Fahmida Suleman (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013), 371–284 (275); Sheila Blair, *Islamic Calligraphy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2006), 21–22, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781474464475>; Abderrahmane Lakhsassi, “Magie: le point de vue d’Ibn Khaldûn,” in *Coran et talismans: Textes et pratiques magiques en milieu musulman*, ed. Constant Hamès (Paris: Karthala, 2007), 95–112.

might be taken to guarantee it further.<sup>124</sup> The Bohemian judge Ondřej z Dubé (ca. 1320–1412/13) explained (ca. 1400) that, after a paternoster, an oath could be said “to the cross,” with a notary observing the oath taker’s hands to ensure they remained down; raising them would damage the reliability of the oath.<sup>125</sup> In Iceland in 1440, an accused man, along with eleven compurgators, swore on the Bible that he had never slept with a specific person. That Biblical guarantee of his character, magnified eleven times, contributed to his acquittal.<sup>126</sup>

## Doubts

Attitudes towards powerful objects, especially relics, could vary widely. Church authorities sometimes accepted the use of amulets—Thomas Aquinas (1225–74) had approved them when used with reverence<sup>127</sup>—and sometimes outlawed them. Louis XI (1423–83) was preoccupied, in the words of a modern historian, with “everything that heaven had left in the way of tangible signs of its passage on earth,” and that preoccupation sped the King on pilgrimages to relics.<sup>128</sup> One fifteenth-century prohibition singled out the use of Jesus measurements.<sup>129</sup> Early in the sixteenth century, William Tyndale (ca. 1494–1536) complained about those who “hang a piece of St. John’s gospel about their necks.”<sup>130</sup> Conditioned by contemporary recognition of the power of Rome’s Scala Sancta, Martin Luther (1483–1546) climbed to the top while praying the paternoster to save his grandfather from purgatory, but later mused, “Who knows whether it’s true.”<sup>131</sup> Some of the humanists and figures like John Wycliffe (ca. 1328–84) were concerned about the popular cults that surged around relics. Lollards mocked the entire concept of relics: they were “blind” and “deaf,” and the offerings pilgrims gave to shrines gave benefit not to Jesus, but only to the shrine itself. If you need to honour a relic from the time of Jesus, they asked sarcastically, why not instead

124 James A. Watt, “Gaelic Polity and Cultural Identity,” in *A New History of Ireland, Volume II: Medieval Ireland 1169–1534*, ed. Art Cosgrove (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005), 352–96 (327, 342).

125 Jeanne E. Grant, “Oaths and Credibility in the Middle Ages: *Práva zemská česká as a Starting Point*,” in *Evropa a Cechy na konci stredoveku*, ed. Eva Doležalová, Robert Novotný and Pavel Souku (Prague: Filosofia, 2004), 159–69 (166).

126 Jón Þorkelsson, ed., *Diplomatariium Islandicum: Íslenzkt Fornbréfasafn, sem hefir inni a halda bréf og gjörninga, dóma og máldaga, og arar skrár, er snerta Ísland ea íslenzka Menn*, 16 vols. (Reykjavík: Kaupmannahöfn, 1899–1902), V, 13–14.

127 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II–II, q. 96, art. 4.

128 Denieul-Cormier, *Wise and Foolish Kings*, 349–50.

129 *Heidelberger Bilderkatechismus*, Heidelberg, Universitätsbibliothek, Cod. Pal. germ. 438.

130 William Tyndale, *An Answer to Sir Thomas More’s Dialogue*, ed. Henry Walter (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1850), 61.

131 Martin Luther, *Werke*, 120 vols. (Weimar: Hermann Böhlhaus Nachfolger, 1914), LI, 89.

worship Judas's lips?<sup>132</sup> Intellectual elites had no monopoly on doubt; we have seen papal concerns about how the Roman masses would react to the arrival of a Holy Lance of dubious origin. Opinions could vary with a single observer: Bernardino of Siena ridiculed some relics ("Maybe the Virgin Mary was a cow, who had given her milk [...] like a beast?"<sup>133</sup>) but supported others, such as the straw from the Nativity, now in Rome—and noted that the Bible book Ecclesiastes reported the straw as untouched by the pious donkey and ox there.<sup>134</sup> Because belief in relics did not imply belief in all relics, discernment was required.

The Shroud of Turin's status was slippery, and required careful treatment. Sometimes it was promoted as the Shroud itself, and at other times as merely a "figure or representation" of the shroud. Buttressed by ducal support, the Shroud earned the careful support of the papacy. Pope Clement VII, for example, in blocking an attempt to suppress the cult entirely, insisted that the priest who displayed it should announce "in a loud and intelligible voice, without any fraud" that this was only an image of the Shroud. Papal indulgences were offered in 1466, 1506, 1507, 1519, 1530, 1552, 1582, and into the seventeenth century and beyond.<sup>135</sup>

True Cross relics especially attracted doubts. John Mandeville rolled his eyes about the cross fragment on Cyprus: what local monks passed off as the True Cross was really only the cross of Dismas, the good thief executed next to Jesus. Mandeville did not doubt that it was a relic, but merely downgraded its identity to something more plausible.<sup>136</sup> Some Muslim writers were disturbed by the Christian practice of worshipping the cross, mere matter.<sup>137</sup> The Egyptian historian Taqi al-Din al-Maqrizi (1364–1442) debunked the cross cult with the plain ken, by pointing out that Jesus himself had never held the cross as an

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132 H. S. Cronin, "The Twelve Conclusions of the Lollards," *English Historical Review* 22 (1907): 292–304 (300–01).

133 Bernardino of Siena, *Prediche volgari sul Campo di Siena 1427*, ed. Carlo Delcorno, 2 vols. (Milan: Rusconi, 1989), II, 809. See Franco Mormando, *The Preacher's Demons: Bernardino of Siena and the Social Underworld of Early Renaissance Italy* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 102.

134 Bernardino of Siena, *Le prediche volgari*, ed. Luciano Banchi, 3 vols. (Siena: Tip. edit. all'inseg. di S. Bernardino, 1884), II, 375. I find no references to straw in Ecclesiastes.

135 Ulysse Chevalier, *Autour des origines du Suaire de Lirey* (Paris: Picard, 1903), 35–37; Paolo Cozzo, Andrea Merlotti, and Andrea Nicoletti, ed., *The Shroud at Court: History, Usages, Places and Images of a Dynastic Relic* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004390508>; Robin Cormack, *Painting the Soul* (London: Reaktion, 1997), 114–29; Andrea Nicolotti, *Sindone: Storia e leggende di una reliquia controversa* (Turin: Einaudi, 2015); John Beldon Scott, *Architecture for the Shroud: Relic and Ritual in Turin* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 12–14.

136 Mandeville, *Book of Marvels*, 8–11.

137 Mikel de Epalza, *Jésus otage: Juifs, chrétiens et musulmans en Espagne (VI<sup>e</sup>–XVII<sup>e</sup> s.)* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1987), 225.

important symbol.<sup>138</sup> After the Reformation, doubters noted that the quantity of cross fragments, combined, far exceeded the size of the cross itself—an impossibility given the plain-ken rules of spacetime.

Jesus's Resurrection and Ascension into heaven problematized the status of any earthly remains on earth. The early fifteenth century saw controversies in France and Italy about whether blood relics could be venerated. Opponents pointed out the Jesus was whole in heaven, and so any blood shed on earth would have been re-united with his body at the Resurrection. Thus, any blood remaining on earth could not be Jesus's. Eventually, in 1449, Pope Nicholas V (1397–1455) ruled in favour of the bloodcult, bypassing the problem by deciding that blood relics were not leftover from the Passion, but newly created blood of miraculous origin.<sup>139</sup>

The bodily integrity of Jesus also arose in debates about the foreskin relics. We can better understand their perspective on the foreskin by considering some of their thoughts on Jesus's circumcision. We can look at two approaches, which proceed along similar lines. Gerson, in Paris, 1392, delivered a sermon on Luke, including a passage on the Circumcision.<sup>140</sup> Gerson explained, with the plain ken, that Jesus was circumcised only out of respect for the Jewish cultural sensibilities and respect for the law he was about to fulfill. With the deep ken, Gerson linked the eight days to the eight beatitudes, and circumcision to his own morality: he prayed, via Mary, that Jesus, circumcised, might "circumcise" Gerson's own "mental ears."<sup>141</sup>

Leonardo Dati's (1360–1425) was a rare pro-papal voice at the Council of Constance (1414–18). On the first day of 1417, he delivered to the Council a sermon for the Feast of the Circumcision, drawn from the festal reading, Lk 2:21: "After eight days were accomplished, that the child should be circumcised." Dati's argument had tracks in both kens. With the plain ken, he recognized that Jesus was circumcised eight days after his birth in part because of the cultural-medical practices of the time. Dati recognized the custom of circumcision as a part of first-century Jewish law. That law was limited in time and space, and indeed it was Jesus himself who ended it, by introducing its replacement, the law of baptism. From the first century on, circumcision was no longer required, but became at best irrelevant and potentially positively dangerous. With the

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138 Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, "Some Neglected Aspects of Medieval Muslim Polemics against Christianity," *The Harvard Theological Review* 89 (1996): 61–84 (76), <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0017816000031813>

139 Chenu, "Sang du Christ," col. 1094–97.

140 Jean Gerson, OC, V, xiv; Thomas M. Izbicki, "Leonardo Dati's Sermon on the Circumcision of Jesus (1417)," in *Friars and Jews in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. Steven J. McMichael (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 191–98 (196–97), [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047400219\\_013](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047400219_013)

141 Jean Gerson, "In Circumcisione Domini," in OC, V, 459–63.



deep ken, Dati asserted that decorum (*congruitate*) required any legislator to voluntarily submit to the law, and so Jesus had to submit to the law of circumcision even as he repealed it. In addition, circumcision worked as a symbol with deep-ken force. Jesus's bleeding during the Circumcision prefigured bleeding during his execution. Original sin was *transfunditur* [transfused] (through the penis, implying that injuring that organ gave a moral benefit). The eight days between birth and circumcision to the plain ken was a historical custom, but to the deep ken was a symbol of the seven—a number of perfection—virtues plus their fulfillment ( $7+1=8$ ).<sup>142</sup>

In general, theologians believed that circumcision had once been important, but with Jesus's new dispensation the operation no longer had any sacramental use. Instead, it was a first-century cultural artifact now useful only for its ability to teach a moral lesson. This reflects a double shift of the deep ken to the plain. These circumcision complications problematized debates on the foreskin relics themselves. Some contemporary theologians, using the plain ken, objected to multiple foreskins. Others repeated the argument about the blood relics: The existence of even one foreskin undermined the Resurrection, as Jesus's body should be fully intact in Heaven. Jan Hus (ca. 1370–1415) found the entire business ridiculous: Jesus's foreskin was no more independent of Jesus than his head was.<sup>143</sup>

In some cases, the authenticity of a Jesus object was proved not by intellectual argument, but by the relic's manifest ability to work miracles.<sup>144</sup> The True Cross's ability to multiply itself in defiance of plain-ken spacetime rules was taken not only as evidence of fraud, but of its power and truth.<sup>145</sup> Similarly, crucifixes, as well as statues of the Madonna, would miraculously travel long distances around the Mediterranean. Sicily was a hotspot for this, and on Corsica the Église Sainte-Croix de Bastia housed a black-oak crucifix recovered from the Mediterranean by fishermen in 1428.<sup>146</sup> Crucifixes bled miraculously for the 1400 Jubilee at Rome.<sup>147</sup> One pilgrim at Cyprus described that the ambiguous cross, of Jesus or of the Good Thief, floated in the air without support, and at Rhodes the holy thorn blossomed annually on Good Friday.<sup>148</sup>

Very few dismissed all relics, even those existing in implausibly high numbers. Some relics might have only touched the original, or contained some

142 Izbicki, "Leonardo Dati's Sermon," 191–98.

143 Jan Hus, "Tractatus," in *Opera Omnia*, ed. Václav Flajšhans, 3 vols. (Prague: Bursik, 1904), I, fasc. 3, 10–11; Palazzo, "Veneration," 167–68.

144 John O'Donovan, ed., *Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland by the Four Masters*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 7 vols. (Dublin: Hodges, Smith, 1856), IV, 1118–19.

145 Morse, "Creating Sacred Space," 64.

146 Giovanni Becatti, "Il Culto di Ercole a Ostia e un nuovo rilievo votivo," *Bullettino della Commissione archeologica comunale di Roma* 67 (1940): 37–60 (53–54); Giuseppe Pitrè, *Feste patronali in Sicilia* (Palermo: Clausen, 1900), 20.

147 Welsh, *Battle for Christendom*, 74.

148 Wey, *Itineraries*, 52.

fragment of the original, and then the tactile chain forgotten, but were not necessarily intentionally fraudulent. Perhaps the plain-ken origins of such relics subordinated to the deep-ken origins—the object’s relationship to the perfect object, or to Christ. Mandeville’s *Travels* understood that the spear that pierced Jesus’s side was unlikely to be in Constantinople and Paris simultaneously, and indeed the spear-heads in the two cities were of different sizes.<sup>149</sup> John Baylis of Rolvenden (d. ca. 1511) recommended relics be examined by torching them: holy relics would survive. Annoyed at his wife’s pilgrimage to see local relics, which he considered a cash grab, he was antagonized by her report that the parson had claimed their sanctity on the grounds of their surviving a church fire. He insisted, perhaps sarcastically, on personally seeing them directly burnt: “When I shall see them before me put between two faggots burning and they not perished, then will I believe that they be holy relics.”<sup>150</sup>

## Envoi

This chapter, alongside those on written sources (Chapter 4) and on places (Chapter 5), together outline the main facets of the Jesus cult: written accounts, objects, and buildings. We see four characteristics stretching across these categories: first, many of the examples were biographical, in that they connected with different points of Jesus’s life. One could hypothetically ignore the canonical accounts to construct a Life from the relics and temples, from his umbilical cord to the Damascus minaret that awaited his return. Second, many were instructional, in that they made an argument for (or against) Jesus’s divinity. Third, many were powerful, in that they effectively added to the material or immaterial prosperity of the cultists who used them, from Palestinian women who wanted to lactate bounteously to Spanish farmers seeking to free their cows from “passions and sicknesses.” Fourth, many were liturgical, in that they played roles in the public worship of Jesus and of Yahweh. We also see a rise of the plain ken as a cause of, and a result of, better astronomy and travel: Muslim improvements in the *qibla*, as well as Christians travelling to the Holy Land and collecting ugly numbers as souvenirs.

Fifteenth-century Jesus objects had functions that could be described as both magical and mundane. A textile imagery could make the invisible seen, and its decorations could reveal its own value and the value of what it depicted. A bell could consonate with the liturgy to ward off storms and spirits, while any cross-shaped object could consonate with the True Cross, the instrument of Jesus’s execution and triumph. Many of the functions of the cross involved

149 Mandeville, *Book of Marvels*, 11.

150 K. L. Wood-Legh, ed., *Kentish Visitations of Archbishop William Warham and His Deputies, 1511–1512* (Kent: Kent Archaeological Society, 1984), 211.

communication, marking locations for navigators and preachers, proclaiming the generosity of the gift giver or the assent of the illiterate. When doubts arose, many spoke to the plain ken: the rules of spacetime prevented multiplication, or demoted circumcision and crucifixion from powerful symbols to everyday first-century customs.

Perhaps the most global Jesus object of the period is this chasuble (see Fig. 8.7).<sup>151</sup> We see a gold-threaded phoenix and a guardian lion (石獅) on this silk piece—a distinctively Chinese pattern. The phoenix flies to something not native to China—five interlaced vertical strokes forming a highly stylized version of the word “Allah.” On the orphrey, the gold-thread-on-silk band, the Latin word “Maria” hovers beneath a pelican piercing its breast so the blood can nourish its chicks. This is thus a Christian-Islamo-Chinese chasuble. It had been made in central Europe by artisans inspired by Muslims aesthetics, which in turn had been inspired by the Chinese. Such a garment would have been worn by a Christian priest celebrating the Eucharist, producing the tangible blood and body of Jesus in a way less violent than a pelican, but more mysterious, as we see in the next chapter.



Fig. 8.7 Fragmentary Chasuble with Woven Orphrey Band (ca. 1380s), Cleveland Museum of Art, CC0 1.0, <http://www.clevelandart.org/art/1928.653>

<sup>151</sup> See Anthony Welch, *Calligraphy in the Arts of the Muslim World* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1979), cat. 28.

# 9. The Eucharist in Its Liturgical Context

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The blood and body of Jesus—wine transformed by the Eucharist ritual—filled a chalice held high above the altar by the Archbishop Egbert of Trier (ca. 950–93). From the heights of that cathedral, a solitary sparrow dove down deep, releasing its payload on the ecclesiastical dignity with a splat. Where the plain ken would see a careless bird defecating randomly, the deep ken could recognize the malicious bird’s intent in releasing feces rich with implication.

Whether accident or treachery, the incident was not unprecedented. The popular medieval collection of Sanskrit stories called the *Śukasaptati* [Seventy Tales of the Parrot], available by 1400 in Malay and Persian translation, includes an account of a Brahmin boy whose prayers at the side of the Ganges were similarly bird-bombed.<sup>1</sup> Archbishop Egbert had no need of Core literature to understand what had happened. Inclined to the deep ken, the outraged Archbishop banned all sparrows from the cathedral, on pain of death, a ban held good into the nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup>

Egbert was not a plain-ken enthusiast, nor a fool. The sparrow had interrupted his execution of the Eucharist, the central rite in the Christian subcult. The fundamental design was rather straightforward—far less finicky than the Sanskrit rituals performed by the Brahmins in the Core—but the output was real, and awesome, the actual blood and body of Jesus. That awesomeness charged its environment with meaning. The time and place of the Eucharist *need* not be exact, but, given the resulting presence of God, it *should* be optimized. This chapter examines the plain-ken procedure of the Eucharist within its complex deep-ken context. After introducing the mass, the liturgical event that climaxes in the Eucharist, the chapter looks at the mechanics, controversies, and miracles surrounding the creation of Jesus’s body and blood.

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1 A. N. D. Haksar, trans., *Shuka Saptati* (New Delhi: HarperCollins, 2000), 2–4.

2 E. P. Evans, *The Criminal Prosecution and Capital Punishment of Animals* (London: Heinemann, 1906), 28.

## The Mass in the Far West

The mass is a complex technical procedure, requiring precise timing and intentioned design; it coordinates space and time, thoughts, words, and deeds. The actual requirements for the mass were simple, but a variety of deep-ken factors could be taken into account to optimize its performance. The “rite” is a subsubcult’s calendar arrangements, its liturgy (both texts and actions), and its chants. A church’s rite established its rules for the mass.

In the Latin Far West, most of the masses followed the rules of the Roman Rite, with many local flavours with minor variations, as at Esztergom, Troyes, Salisbury (“Sarum”), Lyons, York, Hereford, and Cologne. Modern historians have traced how the medieval Franks had imported the Rite, improved or ruined it, depending on one’s perspective, and then exported it back to Rome. In 1400, the Roman Rite was understood to have been mostly set by the sixth-century Pope Gregory I (ca. 540–604), called Great, and by the Holy Spirit, although historians today are cautious about affirming either’s actual contribution.

Beyond the Roman Rite and its variations, other rites could still be found in certain places throughout the Latin Far West—like the Ambrosian Rite in Milan and the Mozarabic Rite in Toledo—and in certain religious orders, such as the Carthusians, or the Birgittines’ *cantus sororum*. The variations between the various Rites were minor, even trivial to outside eyes. The Ambrosian Rite, for example, lacked the Agnus Dei and postponed Ash Wednesday, but increased the number of weeks in Advent from four to six. The Mozarabic Rite was longer, and allowed the celebrant to choose between alternative prayer formulas.

A growing geography enjoyed uniformity under the Roman Rite—at least Rome enjoyed that uniformity—and those permitted their own Rites jealously guarded those privileges. When Cardinal Francisco Jiménez de Cisneros (1436–1517) published, with papal support, a missal and breviary for the Mozarabic Rite, he quietly made a number of changes to make it more Roman.<sup>3</sup> In Milan, for Christmas 1440, Cardinal Branda da Castiglione (1350–1443) pointedly celebrated the mass according to the Roman Rite, rather than the local Ambrosian; in response, indignant crowds pointedly attacked his palace.<sup>4</sup>

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3 This had long been a struggle. In 1085, Toledo used a duel to decide between the Mozarabic and Roman Rites. The Castilian Queen, Constance of Burgundy (1046–93), disapproved of settling the question in so arbitrary a manner, and afterwards revisited the issue more sensibly by having one book of each liturgy set aflame. J. G. Millingen, *The History of Duelling*, 2 vols. (London: Bentley, 1841), I, 48–49.

4 Julia Cartwright, *Baldassare Castiglione: The Perfect Courtier, His Life and Letters, 1478–1529*, 2 vols. (London: Murray, 1908), I, 3–4.

## Jesus-Based Calendars

Our calendars reflect our conception of time, regular and homogenous, divided into interchangeable units. Compared to our calendar today, neatly arranged by days and months into dates, in 1400 the seasons would have loomed larger, as would the religious festivals. The festivals were a projection of the life of Christ onto broader time. The Dominican Henry Suso (1295–1366) explained that his wildly popular *Horologium sapientiae* [Clock of Wisdom] took its design from a vision given him by Jesus, who showed him a clock “of very beautiful and very noble style, of which the wheels were excellent and the bells sounded sweetly,” a clock that was in some sense Jesus as well as the human’s soul, all in agreement with the time of God.<sup>5</sup>

### Structure

|                           | UNDERLYING<br>SOLAR CALENDAR  | UNDERLYING<br>LUNAR CALENDAR   |
|---------------------------|---|--|
| <b>CHRISTMAS</b><br>cycle | <b>Advent</b> [4 Sundays<br>before Christmas]<br><br><b>CHRISTMAS</b><br>[25 December]<br><br><b>Circumcision</b><br>[1 January]<br><br><b>Epiphany</b> [6 January] |  |
| <i>bridge</i>             | Sundays after Epiphany (variable)<br>Sundays before Easter (four)   |  |
| <b>EASTER</b><br>cycle    |   | <b>Lent</b> (40 non-Sunday days before Easter)<br><b>Palm Sunday</b> (Sunday before Easter)<br><b>Three Days</b> (3 days before Easter)<br><b>EASTER</b><br><b>Ascension Thursday</b> (39 days after Easter)<br><b>Pentecost Sunday</b> (49 days after Easter) |
| <i>bridge</i>             | Sundays after Pentecost (variable, up to 28), including in West:<br>Trinity Sunday (56 days after Easter)<br>Corpus Christi (Thursday 60 days after Easter)         |  |

Table 9.1 Basic Christian Calendar.

5 Henry Suso, *L'Horloge de sapience*, Brussels, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, MS IV 111, fol. 14ra.

The specifics of each Rite, which words to say, and how, depended primarily on the calendar. The Christian calendar is a hybrid. For part of the year, it operates under a solar calendar, inherited from the pagan Romans, centred around Christmas. Our own calendar today is also solar, and so, for us, Christmas arrives each year on 25 December. In February or early March, the Christian calendar switches gears into a lunisolar calendar, of Hebrew origin, arranged around Easter. The method of locating Easter in the solar calendar was a source of great controversy over the centuries. Because a lunar cycle (about 29.5 days) does not evenly divide a solar cycle (about 365.25 days), even a consistent method places Easter on different days of the solar calendar in different years. In contrast, if we normally used the lunisolar calendar, Easter could be fixed, and Christmas would migrate erratically. The calendar leaves the solar cycle soon after Christmas, and returns to it after Pentecost. If Christmas and Easter occur relatively close to each other, the first transition period is short, and the latter long; if Christmas and Easter occur relatively far from each other, the former transition is long, and the latter short. The transition periods expand and contract as necessary to accommodate the calendar's hybridity.

The Christmas cycle begins with four Sundays of Advent in preparation for Jesus's coming, then Christmas itself on 25 December for his birth, Circumcision on the octave (eight days later, 1 January) of Christmas, and finally Epiphany (6 January). In some Christian subcults, Epiphany is the most important of these, and we would better speak of an Epiphany cycle than a Christmas cycle. Epiphany celebrates the manifestation of Jesus's divinity, the moment when his Incarnation as human actually becomes known to humans—a more momentous occasion than the mere birth of his humanity. Among the Christians, towards the East they link Epiphany with his baptism, and towards the West with the Adoration of the Magi. Epiphany also connects with Jesus's first public miracle, when he transforms water into wine at a marriage at Cana. The Bible gives no date for that marriage, but the architects of the calendar noticed the resonance between the deep meanings of Epiphany and of the first public miracle, and with the deep ken concluded that the latter occurred on the anniversary of the former, like notes an octave apart.

The Easter cycle begins with Lent, a forty-day period, excluding Sundays, of a restricted diet devoid of mammal flesh, in imitation of a fast held by Jesus. Eating fish was allowed, and a popular alternative. Henry Bolingbroke's (1367–1413, the future Henry IV of England) austere pescatarian fast was limited to nothing more than bream, cod, conger eels, crabs, flat fish, flounder, freshwater eels, herring, lampreys, lobsters, pike, plaice, porpoise(!), ray, roach, salt fish,

sturgeon, tench, thornbacks, trout, whale, and whelks.<sup>6</sup> In the fourteenth century, increased demand in Central Europe, with the eastward expansion of Christianity, was such to refocus the Icelandic economy onto the commodified export of dried fish, with Hanseatic merchants as intermediaries.<sup>7</sup> The power of the export market for fish transformed the lives of farmers and of marine mammals, as so many fish were being murdered and exported and so many farmers became fishermen. Over the next two centuries, grain became steadily less cropped, and bread would soon have to be imported.<sup>8</sup> Some involuntary pescatarians suffered. One British child complained that you would “not believe how weary I am of fish” because “it has engendered so much phlegm within me that it stops my pipes [such] that I can neither speak nor breath.”<sup>9</sup> Exceptions existed. Grand Duchess Anna of Lithuania (ca. 1350–1418) asked for papal permission to eat meat because of her allergies to fish.<sup>10</sup> To create a Lenten flesh alternative to the fish being exported, the pope in 1481 decided that dead seals were sufficiently fish-like to be consumed in Iceland even during fasts.<sup>11</sup>

Lent’s last week includes Palm Sunday, remembering Jesus’s entry into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey, and the “Three Days” remembering the events of his Passion on Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday. The next day is Easter, the celebration of Jesus’s Resurrection. Pentecost, linking the Holy Spirit to Jesus’s disciples, comes 49 days later. Roughly two dozen, depending on how the calendar cycles align, Sundays after Pentecost follow, amid which are two relatively recent innovations in the Roman Catholic calendar: Trinity Sunday, made obligatory in 1334, comes 56 days after Easter, and Corpus Christi, made universal in the thirteenth century, 60 days after Easter.

These special days all overshadowed 1 January as the first day of the calendar. Even the Far West could not agree on a consistent New Year’s Day. Depending on location, the new year could begin on Christmas, the Feast of the

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- 6 This applied to Henry’s Fridays; his Lents were probably similar. Ian Mortimer, *The Fears of Henry IV: The Life of England’s Self-made King* (London: Vintage Books, 2007), 92.
  - 7 Gunnar Karlsson, *The History of Iceland* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 110.
  - 8 Kirsten Hastrup, *Nature and Policy in Iceland, 1400–1800: An Anthropological Analysis of History and Mentality* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 56–58.
  - 9 *A Fifteenth Century School Book, from a Manuscript in the British Museum* (Ms. Arundel 249), ed. William Nelson (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1956), 8.
  - 10 Stephen Christopher Rowell, “Was Fifteenth-Century Lithuanian Catholicism as Lukewarm as Sixteenth-Century Reformers and Later Commentators Would Have Us Believe?,” *Central Europe* 8 (2010): 86–106 (91–92), <https://doi.org/10.1179/174582110X12871342860045>
  - 11 *Jón Þorkellson, ed., Diplomatarium Islandicum*, 16 vols. (Reykjavík: Í Félagsprentsmiðju, 1909–13), IX, 39–40.



Circumcision (1 January), Good Friday, Holy Saturday, or Easter Sunday. Only in 1752 did England move the new year to 1 January.<sup>12</sup>

### *Significance*

Jesus-related feast days had implications beyond the requirements of the rite. Henry IV was born on 15 April 1367, Maundy Thursday, and celebrated his birthday every year on Maundy Thursday, even though it rarely fell on 15 April.<sup>13</sup> In 1382, Henry celebrated his birthday on 3 April, a Maundy Thursday, and broke with the tradition of giving alms to 13 poor men, instead giving to 15, to consonate with his age. This became a custom, one that would become politically charged in the fifteenth century by the Lancastrians.<sup>14</sup> English kings were not the only people to observe Maundy Thursday. By 1521, Danish law specified that witches could be identified by how they behaved on that day.<sup>15</sup>

Jesus holidays could create danger or safety. On 17 December 1399, a cabal against Henry IV set the following Epiphany as the date for seizing the new king: the deep ken linked the plot to the Epiphany's meaning of revelation, while the plain ken took advantage of a distracted king celebrating the feast.<sup>16</sup> In contrast, some Italians had discovered, or deduced, that eating an egg on Ascension Day protected them from fire.<sup>17</sup>

This calendar finds deep-ken meaning in the plain-ken progress of human time. In the Late Traditional period, the Far Western educational system centred on the quadrivium, four subjects used to measure things: arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy. The calendar lies at their intersection. The regular reconciliation of the two cycles, which from the perspective of the Christmas/Epiphany cycle essentially entails the calculation of the date of Easter, was important and divisive. Even the weekly cycles within the larger annual cycle had Jesus-related meaning: Some theologians argued that Sundays were important because Jesus was born on a Sunday.<sup>18</sup>

12 Duncan Steel, *Marking Time: The Epic Quest to Invent the Perfect Calendar* (New York: Wiley, 2000), 140.

13 Ian Mortimer, "Henry IV's Date of Birth and the Royal Maundy," *Historical Research* 80 (2007): 567–76, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2281.2006.00403.x>

14 Kew, National Archives, DL 28:1:1, fol. 4r.

15 Stephen A. Mitchell, *Witchcraft and Magic in the Nordic Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 205.

16 Chris Given-Wilson, ed., *Chronicles of the Revolution, 1397–1400: The Reign of Richard II* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1993), 224–39.

17 This was reported by Bernardino of Siena, who was appalled. Bernardino of Siena, *Le Prediche Volgari*, ed. Ciro Cannarozzi, 2 vols. (Pistoia: Pacinotti, 1934), II, 182.

18 Alonso de Espina and Bernardino of Siena, for example. I expect the logic was circular: we know Jesus was born on a Sunday because Sundays, like Jesus,

The year number also had significance for Christians. Preachers could easily translate the date into a duration. Christmas was not just a year, but an anniversary: the Lollard William Taylor (d. 1423) mentioned in a sermon that that year was the 1405th anniversary of the Nativity.<sup>19</sup> One saint's life writes a date out to explicitly link it with the Nativity: "as one counts from God's birth one thousand four hundred and twenty years."<sup>20</sup> In his journal, the artist Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528) qualified a reference to the year 1486 with the statement, "as one counts from the birth of Christ."<sup>21</sup> Of course, particularism reigned here too: Christians at Alexandria dated the years from the beginning of the reign of Diocletian (AD 284), and their co-subcultists in Armenia dated the years from AD 552, the year of their schism. Muslims, in contrast, dated the years from the Hijrah, in AD 622.

### *Controversies*

For centuries, Christian scholars sought to reform their calendar, not least because of their perception that its problems made Christianity look bad in the eyes of Jews and Muslims. The gospels never gave precise dating information, but offered clues—an imperial census at the Nativity, the Passover festival before his arrest, and a three-hour "darkness coming over the land" before his death. John appeared to disagree with the other gospels about the timing of Jesus's Passion. Discrepancies in historical sources outside the Bible only compounded the confusion. Taking up the plain ken, scholars studied imperial history, Jewish culture, and—interpreting the darkness as an eclipse—astronomy to turn these clues into dates.

The English Franciscan Roger Bacon (1220–92) had advocated 25 December AD 1 and 3 April, AD 33 for the dates of Jesus's birth and death. His findings remained influential in our period, appearing in the calendar studies of

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were important. Circular logic works in the deep-ken perspective. See Steven J. McMichael, "Alfonso de Espina on the Mosaic Law," in *Friars and Jews in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. Steven J. McMichael and Susan E. Myers (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 199–224 (221).

- 19 Anne Hudson, *The Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 13–14.
- 20 Karl Bihlmeyer, "Die schwäbische Mysterikerin Elsbeth Achler von Reute (+1420) und die Überlieferung ihrer Vita," in *Festgabe Philipp Strauch. Zum 80. Geburtstage am 23. September 1932*, ed. Georg Baesecke and Ferdinand Joseph Schneider, *Hermaea* 32 (Halle: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1932), 88–109 (105).
- 21 Albrecht Dürer, *Schriftlicher Nachlass*, ed. Ernst Heidrich (Berlin: Bard, 1910), 12–13.

Pierre d'Ailly (1351–1420) and Nicholas of Cusa (1401–64).<sup>22</sup> A 25 December Christmas had been favoured for centuries, although, even in the sixteenth century, serious scholars argued for an autumn Nativity. No consensus formed around the birth year (1 BC, AD 1, AD 2?), or the death day (3 April, 25 March?) or year (AD 33, AD 36?). Scholarly debate raged through and beyond our time period; Copernicus (1473–1543) remarked that it had inspired him to go into astronomy.<sup>23</sup>

Deep-ken logic played a role. A death date of 25 March benefited from the coincidence of the feast of the Annunciation also taking place on that day: Jesus's conception and death sharing a date would give symmetry to the beginning and end of his human life.<sup>24</sup> The time spent in the tomb, the interval between Jesus's death and the Resurrection, should match the three full days and nights that the prophet Jonah passed in the belly of the whale, a consonance pointed out by Jesus himself (Mt 12:40). Paul of Middelburg (1446–1543) reported Jews criticizing Christian scholars' death dates that fail to give Jesus the full 72 hours in the tomb.<sup>25</sup>

With the plain ken, the scholars paid attention to the circumstances of the first century. Paul of Middelburg drew on Jewish texts he understood to have come from that period.<sup>26</sup> From Basel, Hermann Zoestius (ca. 1380–1445) urged scholars to take into account the *dehiyyot* rules for postponing the sabbath.<sup>27</sup> Peter de Rivo (ca. 1420–90) made a plain-ken argument to deny that those rules were current during the time of Jesus: they were actually a later invention by Jews, made merely to *detrahant* [disparage] Jesus by making it look as if he had broken Jewish law by eating on the Passover.<sup>28</sup> To answer objections based on a lack of ancient calendrical scholarship, Alfonso de Madrigal (ca. 1410–55), known as El

22 Ferdinand Kaltenbrunner, *Die Vorgeschichte der gregorianischen Kalenderreform* (Vienna: Holzhausen, 1876), 40–64.

23 Copernicus, *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium* (Nuremberg: Petreium, 1543), fol. 4v (preface).

24 Damianus Lazzarato, *Chronologia Christi seu discordantium fontium concordantia* (Naples: M. D'auria pontificius, 1952), 468.

25 Paul of Middelburg, *Pavolina de recta Paschae celebratione* (Fossombrone: Petrus, 1513), A, 2v. See Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples and the Three Marias Debates, ed. Sheila M. Porter (Geneva: Droz, 2009), with an overview of the debate at 51–61.

26 Paul of Middelburg, *Pavolina de recta Paschae celebratione*, D 6v–E 6r.

27 Addendum to *De fermento et azymo*, BSB Clm 3564, fol. 144v. See C. Philipp E. Nothhaft, "A Tool for Many Purposes: Hermann Zoest and the Medieval Christian Appropriation of the Jewish Calendar," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 65 (2014): 148–68, <http://dx.doi.org/10.18647/3167/JJS-2014>

28 Peter de Rivo, *Responsivum ad Epistolam apologeticam M Pauli de middelburgo* (Louvain: Ludovicus Ravescot, 1488), C, 4r–6r. See *Peter de Rivo on Chronology and the Calendar*, ed. Matthew S. Champion, Serena Masolini, and C. Philipp E. Nothhaft (Leuven: Leuven UP, 2020), liii–lxii, <https://doi.org/10.11116/9789461663474>

Tostado, put himself in the psychology of an early Christian, and concluded they were too busy being persecuted to worry about calculating exact dates.<sup>29</sup>

### Benefits for the Living

The official purpose of the mass was union with Jesus, the reception of grace, and participation in his sacrifice. Around 1400, most Christian experts believed that the mass was not itself a sacrifice, since Jesus died only once, according to the plain ken. In practice, though, it acted like a sacrifice made again to God.<sup>30</sup>

Theorists had figured out the more subtle nuances of the mass. Albertus Magnus (ca. 1200–80) had analyzed the mass into three components, and others followed his lead. Dividing the mass into parts laid the foundation for more allegorical interpretations, despite Albertus’s warning against them.<sup>31</sup> Ludolph of Saxony (ca. 1295–1378) found consonance between the Descent from the Cross and the Eucharist, itself something like a “Descent from the altar”—but the Eucharist was superior, Ludolph insisted, as it involved taking Jesus not just in one’s arms, but in one’s mouth and heart.<sup>32</sup> By 1400, so many deep-ken explanations were in circulation that they ran into each other and became mixed up. Nicholas and Theodore of Andida’s eleventh-century *Protheoria* had connected the mass liturgy sequence with the life of Jesus, and remained popular in our period.<sup>33</sup> The friar Michael of Hungary (d. 1482) identified thirty-three discrete steps in the mass, which the deep ken associated with Jesus’s thirty-three years on earth.<sup>34</sup> Others connected the mass to a sequence that concluded with the Passion but began before Jesus’s birth, in the Old Testament.<sup>35</sup> These traditions converged into the main guide for understanding the mass, the *Rationale divinatorum officiorum* [Logic of the Divine Offices] of Guillaume Durand (ca. 1230–96); extant in countless manuscripts, and numbering over three dozen printings by 1500, his work was also influential in encouraging

29 Alfonso Tostado, *Defensorium trium conclusionum*, in Tostado, *Opera Omnia*, 27 vols. (Venice: Pezzana, 1728), XXV, 115 (part 2, ch. 20).

30 Gabriel Biel, *Sacri canonis misse* (n.p.: Jean Clein, 1517), lectio 26, fol. 35v–38r.

31 Adolph Franz, *Die Messe im Deutschen Mittelalter* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herdersche, 1963), 440, 460, 467.

32 Ludolphus de Saxonia, *Vita Jesu Christi*, ed. L. M. Rigollot, 4 vols. (Paris: Palmé, 1878), IV, 143 (part 2.2, ch. 65).

33 Hans-Joachim Schulz, *The Byzantine Liturgy* (New York: Pueblo, 1986), 89–90; Robin Cormack, *Icons* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2007), 60–61.

34 Michael of Hungary, *Sermones dominicales perutiles a quodam fratre Hungaro* (Haguenau: Rynman, ca. 1516), Sermon 79.

35 This tradition goes back substantially to Ivo of Chartres (d. 1115). See Ivo of Chartres, Sermon 5, col. 535–62, in Johannes Gerson, *Opera Omnia*, 5 vols. (Antwerp: Sumpitibus Societatis, 1706), II, col. 559.

deep-ken understandings in many subsequent theoretical texts. These kinds of examinations had significant value: one university professor, perhaps from Vienna, paid for his room and board at the Mondsee Abbey by giving lectures on the mass.<sup>36</sup>

Unofficially, informal advantages accrued to participants in the mass. Lists of these differed by location, presumably based on past outcomes. Across Europe, from England to Hungary, “unfailing results” were promised.<sup>37</sup> Thomas Brinton (d. 1389), Bishop of Rochester, named a series of bonuses. Some spoke to the deep ken: one did not age during the ceremony—in a sense, temporality stopped—and every footfall on the way to the ceremony was recognized as meaningful by angels, who counted their number. Brinton noted more plain-ken advantages as well: participation protected one against blindness, gossip, starvation, and sudden death.<sup>38</sup> Francis of Paola (1416–1507) was able to carry flaming embers without injury while assisting at mass. Other sources promised that any words uttered rashly would be forgiven. New masses were introduced specifically to defend health and property.<sup>39</sup> The benefits of the mass had been increasing in recent times. One formulation compared hearing the mass favourably to acts of asceticism and generosity: a rich person would benefit more from attending a single mass than by giving away everything the sun shines upon and suffering “in heat and in frost / in hunger and in thirst.”<sup>40</sup> Thus, Jean Gerson (1363–1429) felt a need to caution against careless promises of mass results, which might encourage people to attend for the wrong, superstitious (called “Jewish,” in his view) reasons.<sup>41</sup> Experts cautioned that thinking of Jesus’s Passion was more beneficial than merely hearing the mass or parroting prayers.<sup>42</sup>

### Benefits for the Dead

The mass could be closely tied to the well-being of the dead. At her execution, Joan of Arc (ca. 1412–31) requested that the priests present say a mass for her,

36 Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. 3776, fol. 61r.

37 Josef A. Jungmann, *The Mass of the Roman Rite*, trans. Francis A. Brunner, 2 vols. (New York: Benziger, 1951), I, 130.

38 Thomas Brinton, *The Sermons of Thomas Brinton, Bishop of Rochester (1373–1389)*, ed. Mary Aquinas Devlin, 2 vols. (London: Royal Historical Society, 1954), II, 215–16.

39 Franz, *Die Messe im Deutschen Mittelalter*, 36–72, 102–217.

40 Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. 13292.

41 Gerson, *Opera Omnia*, II, col. 521–23.

42 Peter Lombard, *Sententiarum Libri Quatuor*, col. 519–954, in *Opera Omnia*, in *Patrologia Latina*, ed. J.-P. Migne, 217 vols. (Paris: Garnier, 1855), CXCII, at col. 858–59 (book 4, distinction 9).

and asked that a cross be held before her face.<sup>43</sup> One of her generals, the Baron Gilles de Rais (ca. 1405–40), was accused of murdering children and threatening a priest celebrating mass; before being executed, by hanging and subsequent burning, Gilles asked the parents “whose children he had murdered that for the love of the Passion of Our Lord, they pray to God for him and forgive him in good heart.”<sup>44</sup> Priests at Notre Dame celebrated masses for the knights fallen in the crusade at Nicopolis; one father endowed a mass to ensure his sons’ safe homecoming.<sup>45</sup> A Swedish ballad remembers the death of a lord named Marten; because he had not arranged for sufficient masses to be said for his soul, two days later he returned from the dead, explaining he “can’t lie down / and I can’t rest.” His widow released him by having seventy masses said for him.<sup>46</sup> Another noble in 1389 willed that his funerary mass be attended by thirteen poor men, each holding a candle.<sup>47</sup> By 1521, Strasburg had 120 endowed foundations for the mass, with masses being performed continuously through the mornings.<sup>48</sup>

For a single illustrative example, consider the stipulations of the will of Thomas Beaufort, Duke of Exeter (1377–1426). First, he directed that “immediately after my death, on the following day if possible, or the second or third at the farthest, one thousand masses be said for my soul,” a number powerful to the deep ken. Further, he arranged for “as many poor men as I may have lived years at my funeral, each carrying a torch, and habited in a gown and hood of white cloth, and receiving as many pence as I may have lived years; and that there be the same number of poor women, of good character, clothed in a gown and hood of white cloth, and each receiving a penny.” Note the multiple deep-ken resonances, between his age at death, the number of men, the number of women, and the amount given to each man. These worked together to boost the most immediate role of these participants: “all of them, both men and

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43 Willard Trask, ed., *Joan of Arc in Her Own Words* (New York: Turtle Point, 1996), 144.

44 Reginald Hyatte, *Laughter for the Devil: The Trials of Gilles de Rais, Companion-in-Arms of Joan of Arc (1440)* (Ontario: Associated University Presses, 1984), 9–14, 156.

45 Aziz Suryal Atiya, *The Crusade of Nicopolis* (London: Methuen and Co., 1934), 101; Christoph Brachmann, “The Crusade of Nicopolis, Burgundy, and the Entombment of Christ at Pont-à-Mousson,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 74 (2011): 183–89, <https://doi.org/10.1086/JWCI41418733>

46 “Herr Märten,” in *Svenska Medeltidsballader*, ed. Bengt Jonsson (Lund: Natur och Kultur, 1981), 46–47.

47 Alfred Gibbons, *Early Lincoln Wills* (Lincoln: Williamson, 1888), 56–57.

48 Luzian Pflieger, *Kirchengeschichte der Stadt Strassburg* (Colmar: Alsatia Verlag, 1941), 172.

women, praying for my soul..."<sup>49</sup> Perhaps ill health created urgency: the Duke composed this will on 29 December 1426, and died within a week.

Such urgency contributed to the "multiplication" of masses. As the number of clergy grew, in part from young men unable to get a foot in the door of the guilds, the pressure to say mass daily increased. Lateran IV (1215) had forbidden the purchase of masses, but donations remained acceptable, and in practice could be expected or demanded. So many priests were neglecting to say Sunday mass, preferring instead the stipends gained by saying anniversary masses for the dead, that a provincial council in Florence (1517) threatened fines against the practice when motivated by greed. Some priest "altarists" had the sole function of performing the mass. A parish church in Rouen saw about forty masses a day in 1432. A church could increase its capacity for masses by staggering them: since one could not sing multiple masses at once, the first part of a mass would be sung, and then turn into a "low," spoken mass as a second ceremony began. Churches began to have more and more altars, to remove that as a limiting factor. A church with three dozen altars was not unusual, and, by 1500, both the Magdeburg Cathedral and the Danzig St. Mary's Church had four dozen each. Nuns would have access to their own altars, secondary ones if not the high altar.<sup>50</sup>

## Defining the Eucharist

In the sacrament of the Communion or the "Eucharist"—meaning "thankful," combining Greek terms for "good" and "grace,"—Christian priests regularly—usually daily—effected the body and blood of Jesus. The authorization and command for this came from Jesus himself, who on the eve of his betrayal handed his disciples bread, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body which is given for you," and a cup, adding "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Mt 26:26–28).

49 Nicholas Harris Nicolas, ed., *Testamenta Vetusta*, 2 vols. (London: Nichols, 1826), I, 208–11.

50 Joseph Braun, *Der christliche Altar in seiner geschichtlichen Entwicklung*, 2 vols. (Munich: Alte Meister Guenther Koch, 1924), I, 379–81; Franz, *Die Messe im Deutschen Mittelalter*, 462, 515–17; Jeffrey F. Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany* (New York: Zone, 1998), 89; Jungmann, *Mass*, I, 130–31; Joannes Dominicus Mansi, ed., *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collection*, 39 vols. (Paris: Welter, 1902), XXXV, col. 240, cap. 4; Linda Elaine Neagley, *Disciplined Exuberance: The Parish Church of Saint-Maclou and Late Gothic Architecture in Rouen* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State UP, 1998), 15.

The mass thus created an important ceremonial context for the Eucharist. Indeed, the theologian Henry of Langenstein (ca. 1325–97) explained the entire mass as mere decoration for the consecration of the host.<sup>51</sup> We should resist any modern tendency to reduce “decoration” to the art of making bathrooms and cupcakes attractive. For the deep ken, decoration conferred power onto a ceremony. This even prompted the cross-dressing Joan of Arc to offer to wear a woman’s dress, if that was necessary to attend the mass.<sup>52</sup>

The priest celebrated the Eucharist, consuming the bread and wine he had consecrated. He might be alone, or with a helper, or on a Sunday in a parish church with a lay congregation observing. The layperson’s role was just that, to observe (“ocular Communion”).<sup>53</sup> Ideally, he or she observed from a place of piety, with sins confessed, heart contrite, and reconciled to the community. Unlike in a modern Catholic church, in 1400 the lay observer usually consumed only at Easter, and even then only the baked, stamped, and consecrated Eucharist bread wafers, called “hosts,” which, like the wine, they understood as *both* the body and blood of Jesus (see Fig. 9.1).<sup>54</sup> In the West, the bread was unleavened, but the Ferrara-Florence Council (1438–45), building a bridge eastward, ruled that leavened was also acceptable, and the choice should be made particularistically, “according to the custom of his own eastern or western church.”<sup>55</sup> Some popes, in the preceding, fourteenth century, had given secular rulers special permission to touch the chalice, but access to the wine was normally restricted to the priests. To avoid the accidental desecration of Jesus, a tray or bib (“paten”) would catch crumbs, and a rinse with unconsecrated wine, perhaps watered down, would encourage bits lodged between teeth down to the stomach to be properly consumed. At times that wine rinse would be given even to infants.<sup>56</sup> Some priests denied the Eucharist to those they did not know to be worthy of it. A Lithuanian man whose wife was refused, with an implication that she was morally unworthy, declared that he would sue the priest for “theft.”<sup>57</sup>

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51 Franz, *Die Messe im Deutschen Mittelalter*, 517–22.

52 Trask, ed., *Joan of Arc*, 120–25.

53 Bob Scribner, “Popular Piety and Modes of Visual Perception in Late-Medieval and Reformation Germany,” *Journal of Religious History* 15 (1989): 448–69.

54 One Polish liturgical handbook advised Communion three times annually, at Easter, Pentecost, and Christmas. See Dariusz Baronas and Stephen Christopher Rowell, *The Conversion of Lithuania: From Pagan Barbarians to Late Medieval Christians* (Vilnius: Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore, 2015), 431.

55 This is *Laetentur caeli* (1439). Andreas de Santacroce, *Acta latina concilii Florentini*, ed. Georgius Hofmann (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1955), 261.

56 Jungmann, *Mass*, II, 411–19.

57 Baronas and Rowell, *Conversion of Lithuania*, 100.





Fig. 9.1 Eucharist wafer iron (ca. 1390–1410), Statens Historiska Museum, Stockholm, CC BY 4.0.

A variety of utensils were used to treat the Eucharist. In German nunneries, portals called “Jesus windows” were built into the wall of the choir. If the nuns unlocked their side, and the priest unlocked his, he could pass the consecrated host through the window to them.<sup>58</sup> Special altars were designed to be portable, some of those specifically for shipboard use.<sup>59</sup> Anna von Buchwald, who served as Prioress of the Benedictine Preetz Priory in Schleswig-Holstein (1484–1508), had made a large Madonna statue with a special hand made of copper, essentially to replace the priest: the Madonna would stand on the altar and with her copper hand serve the nuns unconsecrated ablution wine from the chalice formerly used for the consecrated Eucharistic wine.<sup>60</sup> These different purpose-built devices give a sense of the variety of contexts in which masses were celebrated.

The elevation of the host was the climax of the mass, both in its drama and its efficacy. The elevation proclaimed, contrary to heretical minorities, that the bread was more than just bread.<sup>61</sup> Continuing a long tradition, Ludolph of Saxony compared the elevation with the raising of the cross.<sup>62</sup> Contemporary mass handbooks specified that the priest’s arms be lifted in remembrance of the Resurrection and Ascension, and stretched out (after consecration) in imitation

58 Johannes Meyer, *Women’s History in the Age of Reformation: Johannes Meyer’s Chronicle of the Dominican Observance*, trans. Claire Taylor Jones (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2019), 104.

59 “Portable Altar,” Museum Exhibits, Wignacourt Museum.

60 A. L. J. Michelsen, ed., *Urkundensammlung der Schleswig-Holstein-Lauenburgischen Gesellschaft für Vaterländische Geschichte*, 4 vols. (Kiel: n.p., 1839), I, 400.

61 Jungmann, *Mass*, I, 118–19.

62 *Ibid.*, I, 115–16; Andrew Kirkman, *The Cultural Life of the Early Polyphonic Mass* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2010), 182.

of the Crucifixion.<sup>63</sup> An assistant behind the priest might hold up his chasuble so that the priest could elevate the host even higher; we see this, for example, in some visual representations of the Mass of St. Gregory.<sup>64</sup> Such gestures became so dramatic that Henry of Langenstein had to caution priests that excessive movement could cause disaster; for example, the sleeve of the priest's alb might catch on and overturn the chalice.<sup>65</sup>

## Maximizing the Eucharist

A sudden, dramatic acceleration in how often lay people participated in the Eucharist occurred just before our period and cast a long shadow across it. Typically, a Christian would take Communion annually, while those more pious might do so monthly. In extraordinary cases the frequency was higher. One of France's greatest generals, captured by the Ottoman Sultan at Nicopolis, was Jean II Le Maingre, known as Boucicaut (1366–1421), who had a reputation for extreme piety: he dressed all in black on Fridays, and each day took mass twice and spent three hours praying.<sup>66</sup> By 1400, the idea that a layperson could, or even should, consume the host more frequently had become, almost, acceptable. The idea of frequent Communion was often associated with the *Devotio Moderna* and the *Imitation of Christ* (see Chapter 20). In fourteenth-century Prague, the reformed sex workers of New Jerusalem participated in the sacrament daily. This was, in Jan Milíč's (d. 1347) understanding, the key to the tremendous social success of the project.<sup>67</sup> Later synods there (1388–89) rebuked a request for daily Communion as given "not rightly, cautiously, nor prudently," and limited the ritual to once a month.<sup>68</sup>

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63 Hermann von Bruiningk, *Messe und kanonisches Stundengebet nach dem Brauche der Rigaschen Kirche im späteren Mittelalter* (Riga: Kymmell, 1904), 80–86.

64 Christine Göttler, "Is Seeing Believing? The Use of Evidence in Representations for the Miraculous Mass of St. Gregory," *The Germanic Review: Literature, Culture, Theory* 76 (2001): 121–41 (123), <https://doi.org/10.1080/00168890109601550>

65 Henry von Langenstein, "Qualiter signa crucis fieri debeat," in Langenstein, *Secreta sacerdotum* (Nuremberg: Hölzel, 1507), n.p.

66 John P. Harthan, *The Book of Hours* (New York: Park Lane, 1982), 72–73.

67 David R. Holeton, "The Communion of Infants and Hussitism," *Communio viatorum* 27 (1984): 207–25 (208).

68 Thomas Fudge, *Magnificent Ride: The First Reformation in Hussite Bohemia* (Florence: Routledge, 2018), 53–55, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315238531>; František Palacký, ed., *Documenta mag. Joannis Hus vitam, doctrinam, causam in Constantiensi Concilio actam* (Prague: Tempsky, 1869), 699–700; Matthew Spinka, *John Hus: A Biography* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1968), 18; Murray Wagner, *Peter Chelcicky A Radical Separatist in Hussite Bohemia* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1983), 53–55.

The idea of *manducatio per visum* [eating by sight] to describe ocular participation in the mass had been developed in the thirteenth century.<sup>69</sup> People wanted to see the elevation. Henry of Langenstein described people who became depressed or vegetarian on days they did not see the consecrated host.<sup>70</sup> Enthusiasts asked that the elevation be repeated during the mass, despite some authorities insisting that the Crucifixion happening only once meant the elevation could only happen once, per mass. An elevation too hasty or too low might prompt the audience to holler at the priest, “Hold up Sir John, hold up. Heave it a little higher,” and at the tall person in a front row, “Stoop down thou fellow afore, that I may see my Maker. For I cannot be merry except I see my LORD GOD once in a day.”<sup>71</sup> Lawsuits clawed at seats with superior vantage points. Gratuities flowed to priests willing to draw out the moment. The excommunicated were not allowed to see the Eucharist, although some exploited or created holes in church walls to take in its benefits nonetheless.<sup>72</sup>

After seeing the elevated host in one church, enthusiasts could sprint to the next to try to repeat witnessing the elevation in another.<sup>73</sup> Michael of Hungary complained about the many devotees who would arrive immediately before the consecration, and then, immediately after the elevation, “they rush out of the church as if they had seen the devil.” He reflected on this mutually unsatisfying relationship: “O my sweet Jesus, you are not pleasing to them, and certainly they are not pleasing to you!” His contemporary, the Augustinian Gottschalk Hollen (d. 1481), used the same simile to grumble about the crowds who came to the mass when they heard the bells, just in time for the elevation, and then immediately fled, “as if they had seen the devil.”<sup>74</sup>

Additional opportunities for viewing the consecrated host developed. The host was often displayed in a monstrance during the eight days of the Corpus

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69 Barbara Maria Savy, *Manducatio per visum: temi eucaristici nella pittura di Romanino e Moretto* (Cittadella: Bertonecello Artigrafiche, 2006).

70 Henry of Hesse, *Secreta sacerdotum magistri* (Liptzk: Lotter, 1503), n.p. (section “Qualiter hostia debet elevari”).

71 Thomas Becon, *The Displaying of the Popish Masse* (London: A. Griffin, 1637), 183–84.

72 Peter Browe, *Die Verehrung der Eucharistie im Mittelalter* (Sinzig am Rhein: Sankt Meinrad Verl. für Theologie, 1990), 60–62; Jungmann, *Mass*, I, 120–21; Édouard Dumoutet, *Le désir de voir l’hostie et les origines de la dévotion au Saint Sacrement* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1926), 18–25, 65–72.

73 Browe, *Die Verehrung*, 67–68.

74 Gottschalk Hollen, *Sermonum opus exquisitissimum* (Hagenau: n.p., 1517), Sermon 68.

Christi octave.<sup>75</sup> From 1407, it was carried in Corpus processions in Venice.<sup>76</sup> Elaborate carrying cases, described by one historian as “micro-architecture,” large enough to be appropriate for parading the consecrated host around a city, sometimes took forms that represented local buildings.<sup>77</sup> At the most extreme, one Dominican nun spent the day fasting in preparation for watching a priest wash his fingers after they had held the consecrated host.<sup>78</sup>

Images also emphasize the importance of the mass, and of seeing the consecrated host. Lines of linear perspective (see Chapter 14) often converged on, drawing attention to, a Eucharistic focus. This can happen in different modes: Leonardo’s *Last Supper* (ca. 1495–98) converges on Jesus in the act of instituting the Eucharist, Raphael’s *Disputation* (1509–10) on a painted monstrance, and Masaccio’s *Holy Trinity* (ca. 1426–28) just above a space where the mass would have been celebrated upon an attached ledge.

Kneeling for the host became common even outside the elevation. In the fifteenth century, the practice of genuflecting at the host became widespread.<sup>79</sup> Kneeling was a special challenge for the social elite, with their clean clothes and fashionably twisted shoes.<sup>80</sup> Some found ways to make piety and cleanliness compatible: in the 1430s, in their chapel in the Toledo Cathedral, Álvaro da Luna (d. 1453), the Constable of Castile, and his wife Juana Pimentel (d. 1488) had look-alike bronze androids that would automatically kneel for the elevation.<sup>81</sup>

## Eucharist Controversies

England executed John Badby in 1410. He had refused to accept that the Eucharist truly created the body of Jesus. “If every host consecrated at the altar were the Lord’s body,” he pointed out, “then there were twenty thousand gods in England.” The idea created such dissonance with his plain-ken sense of the possibilities of spacetime that he declined an offer of clemency from the future King Henry V (1386–1422), preferring instead to become the first layman

75 Browe, *Die Verehrung*, 98–102, 122–26.

76 Edward Muir, *Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1986), 223–24.

77 J. F. Moffit, “Archetypal Micro-architecture: Prolegomena to the Custodias Procesionales,” *Konsthistorisk Tidskrift* 18 (1989): 47–62.

78 Meyer, *Women’s History*, 109.

79 Jungmann, *Mass*, II, 213.

80 Gottschalk Hollen, *Preceptorium domini* (Nuremberg: Peypus, 1521), fol. 5r.

81 Carmen González Palencia, “La capilla de don Álvaro de Luna en la Catedral de Toledo,” *Archivo Español de Arte y Arqueología* 5 (1929): 109–22; Juan Carrete Parrondo, “Sebastián de Toledo y el sepulcro de don Álvaro de Luna,” *Revista de Ideas Estéticas* 131 (1975): 37–43.

executed in England for reason of heresy.<sup>82</sup> His trial records opposed his plain ken with its own deep ken: in a chain of stepwise consonances, they note that when he answered questions about the Eucharist there appeared on his lips a spider, which represented a serpent, which represented heresy.<sup>83</sup>

Around the same time, 2,000 km to the south, ‘Abd Allah al-Tarjuman (1355–1423) cited Mt 26:26–29, before launching a series of mocking arguments. With a spatial plain ken, he imagined collecting globally all the consecrated bread, and comparing that gigantic doughball to the size of the historical Jesus. He ridiculed Christians who ate Jesus before hypocritically denouncing the Jews for killing him. Al-Tarjuman used the ridiculousness of the mass to undermine the Christian view of Jesus. Such Muslim opposition to the Eucharist had even led to legal opinions supporting the use of cannabis as a superior, non-blasphemous alternative to wine.<sup>84</sup>

The complexity of the Eucharist meant that, naturally, controversies arose, but miracles also occurred to point the way to truth. The second half of this chapter explains the basic mechanism of the Eucharist before surveying both the interpretations of how that mechanism actually worked as well as the range of criticisms assailing every aspect of it. As we will see, the plain ken of Badby and al-Tarjuman animates much, but not all, of those criticisms.

## Mainstream Explanations

How did consecrated wine and bread become Jesus’s body and blood? The humanist scholar Lorenzo Valla (1407–57) pointed out that God becoming bread in the Eucharist is no more difficult to believe than God becoming human in the Incarnation, yet the former troubles people who accept the latter easily.<sup>85</sup> Most Christians in 1400 accepted that the Eucharist *did* work, although the details of the *how* provoked a variety of controversies. Orthodoxy agreed that neither

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- 82 John Foxe, *Acts and Monuments*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: n.p., 1583), 545 [521]; Peter McNiven, *Heresy and Politics in the Reign of Henry IV: The Burning of John Badby* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1987).
- 83 Thomas Waldensis, *Doctrinale antiquitatum fidei catholicae ecclesiae*, 3 vols. (Venice: Bassanese, 1758), II, col. 387.
- 84 Miguel de Epalza, ed. and trans., *La Tuhfa: Autobiografía y polémica islámica contra el Cristianismo de ‘Abdallāh al-Tarjūmān* (Rome: Accademia nazionale dei Lincei, 1971), 32; Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, “Some Neglected Aspects of Medieval Muslim Polemics against Christianity,” *Harvard Theological Review* 89 (1996): 61–84 (74, 78–79); Austin MacPherson, “Wine and Hashish: Substitution of the Eucharist in Sufi Scholarship” (unpublished manuscript, 30 April 2020); Franz Rosenthal, *The Herb: Hashish versus Medieval Muslim Society* (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 154–55.
- 85 Jaroslav Pelikan, *Reformation of Church and Dogma 1300–1700* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 56.

bread nor wine remained after consecration, but no consensus governed the mechanics.

In 1215, the Council Lateran IV ended centuries of debate by agreeing that the authoritative explanation for the mystery was “transubstantiation.” This concept explained how the consecrated bread and wine still appeared to be bread and wine despite actually being the body and blood of Jesus. Drawing from the Aristotelian tradition, theologians distinguished between the substance of an object and its “accidents,” its superficial appearance accessible to human senses. Unconsecrated bread was bread in its accidents and bread in its substance; consecrated, its substance became the body and blood of Jesus, while its accidents remained bread. It thus resembled, but was not, bread. Transubstantiation effected a similar process in the consecration of wine. Deep-ken substances changed while plain-ken accidents endured. Thomas Aquinas (1225–74), whose description of transubstantiation became influential, had good reasons for the flesh not appearing as flesh: eating human meat was “not customary, but horrible” for humans. Furthermore, non-Christian observers might mock the practice, and would cost the pious an opportunity to practice having faith in the unseen.<sup>86</sup>

With transubstantiation providing an authoritative explanation of the process, the theologians shifted the controversy to the exact meaning of “transubstantiation,” about its specific mechanisms and consequences. Against the Dominicans, who generally accepted Thomas Aquinas’s explanation, Franciscans pointed out that God could still use whatever mechanism he pleased to accomplish the transformation. Again contrary to the Dominican doctrine, the Franciscans insisted that a mouse eating a consecrated host was not eating Jesus: transubstantiation did not happen when the eater lacked understanding. The importance of the eater’s mindstate for the nature of the reality of what was being eaten was a kind of deep-ken requirement for the Eucharist. While the next two centuries would see crisis and division over whether the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist was corporeal or spiritual, few theologians in 1400 doubted that his presence was real.<sup>87</sup>

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86 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, III, q. 75, art. 1, 5; Kristen van Ausdall, “Doubt and Authority in the Host-Miracle Shrines of Orvieto and Wilsnack,” in *Art and Architecture of Late Medieval Pilgrimage in Northern Europe and the British Isles*, ed. Sarah Blicke and Rita Tekippe, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2005), II, 513–38 (527), [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047430087\\_023](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047430087_023)

87 Amy Nelson Burnett, *Karlstadt and the Origins of the Eucharistic Controversy: A Study in the Circulation of Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011), 9, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199753994.001.0001>; Marilyn McCord Adams, *Some Later Medieval Theories of the Eucharist: Thomas Aquinas, Giles of Rome, Duns Scotus, and William Ockham* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010).

## Doubts in England

### *Wycliffe's Explanation*

In England, John Wycliffe (ca. 1328–84), although maintaining his belief in the real presence of Jesus in the hosts, investigated the Eucharist with the plain ken. This was necessary because Wycliffe put no weight on the opinion of Thomas Aquinas, “the rash assertion of one man.”<sup>88</sup> Looking at history, Wycliffe noticed that the Church had not consistently taught transubstantiation until the thirteenth century. Looking at the canon, he noticed that (1) Jesus’s words “this is my body” appeared in different ways in various passages of scripture, and that (2) the Vulgate said the seven lean and seven fat oxen of Genesis 41 “are” (*sunt*) seven years—“are,” not “symbolize,” seven years, although that was clearly the intent. Thus, “to be” could also have a meaning that was symbolic or figurative. Therefore, Wycliffe continued, *est* (the same Latin verb, in the singular) of the consecration could also mean *figurat*.<sup>89</sup> Moreover, (3) the Aristotelian terms “accidents” and “substances” were alien to the Bible.<sup>90</sup> Logically, accidents separated from substance created potential absurdities in plain-ken spacetime: Wycliffe wondered where Jesus was actually going if six hosts were moved by priests in the four cardinal directions, plus up and down. In one sermon, Wycliffe advised that we lock priests out of our wine cellars lest they consecrate the wine and turn it into mere accidents.<sup>91</sup>

Why was the fantastic impossible? Wycliffe had faith that God would not trick us. If it looked like bread and tasted like bread, it was bread. After consecration, the host was still bread, a “naked sacrament” (*nudum sacramentum*—that is, the elements alone) under which the body was “hidden invisible to the eye.”<sup>92</sup> Furthermore, if bread were annihilated in transubstantiation, Wycliffe deduced, then “as many consecrated hosts there are, there would be so many openings void of corporeal substance.” Even one such vacuum, he reasoned, would create an infinite vacuum, and, finally, the entire world would become Jesus. His logic depends on the subtleties of metaphysics, with each stage in his reasoning

88 Anthony Kenny, *Wyclif* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985), 82–86.

89 Hudson, *Premature Reformation*, 5.

90 Craig Atwood, *The Theology of the Czech Brethren from Hus to Comenius* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State UP, 2009), 40–41, 58–59.

91 Kenny, *Wyclif*, 86, 97.

92 John Wycliffe, *Sermones*, ed. Johann Loserth, 4 vols. (London: Trübner, 1887–90), I, 164 (sermon 24); John Wycliffe, *De Eucharistia Tractatus Maior*, ed. Johann Loserth (London: Trübner, 1892), 11–12, 15, 28–29 (ch. 1).

amounting to an absurd impossibility.<sup>93</sup> For Wycliffe, the plain ken's continuous space was a given, just as in linear perspective and in Nicole Oresme's (ca. 1320/25–82) graphs correlating distance with speed.<sup>94</sup>

Wycliffe understood Jesus's institution of the Eucharist as being figurative—with the plain ken he was allowing Jesus to speak in a metaphorical way—but it was no less real for being figurative. Wycliffe saw not contradiction but consonance (*consonat*) in that “the same thing should be truth and a figure or sign.” In his institution of the Eucharist, Jesus had used figurative language, but figurative language spoken by Jesus had efficacy—it was “true” in a sense that most figurative language was not, “for it has the efficacy [*efficaciam*] of making the body and blood of Christ exist in fact [*de facto*] beneath the sacramental species.” The body and blood in the sacrament existed “really and truly, but figuratively.” To illustrate, he pointed to the process of writing: if you write a sentence, the words as symbols exist above the paper (*corpus*) and ink beneath them. A literate reader seeking to understand will look more to the symbols than the material paper and ink. In the same way, but even “much more, the habit of faith induces the faithful to understand the true body of Christ through the consecrated bread.” In the Eucharist, Jesus's “humanity is more efficacious [*efficacius*] than in a mere sign.”<sup>95</sup>

Wycliffe found one way to preserve the deep-ken capacity for complexity within the homogeneity of plain-ken spacetime, in the geometry of quadric spaces. Jesus, he explained, was in the consecrated bread just like an image could be in a mirror. If two viewers looked into a mirror, they could see the same face even from different vantage points. That is, a face visible in a mirror would be present at every point on the mirror. In the same way, Jesus's body would be present at every point on the consecrated host.<sup>96</sup> The bread effectively acts like a paraboloid mirror, said by the Polish friar Vitello (ca. 1230–80/1314) to be the best for focusing light at a single point (see Fig. 9.2).<sup>97</sup> Jesus could be in heaven and yet be present intentionally in every host globally, just as you can see yourself in a number of mirrors.<sup>98</sup>

93 John Wycliffe, *Tractatus de Apostasia*, ed. Michael Henry Dziewicki (London: Trübner, 1889), 99–100, 142–45 (ch. 8, 11).

94 Heather Phillips, “John Wyclif and the Optics of the Eucharist,” *Studies in Church History, Subsidia* 5 (1987): 250–58.

95 Wycliffe, *De Eucharistia*, ed. Loserth, 84 (4), 120–21, 144 (5). See Kenny, *Wyclif*, 8, 89; Pelikan, *Reformation*, 58–59.

96 Wycliffe, *De Eucharistia*, ed. Loserth, 11 (1), 298–302 (9); Wycliffe, *Sermones*, ed. Loserth, IV, 352 (sermon 62).

97 Vitello, *Opticae Thesaurus*, ed. Federico Risner (Basil: Episcopios, 1572), 400–01.

98 John Wycliffe, *Trialogus*, trans. Stephen Lahey (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2013), 216–17 (4.8). See Phillips, “John Wyclif and the Optics of the Eucharist,” 251–55.



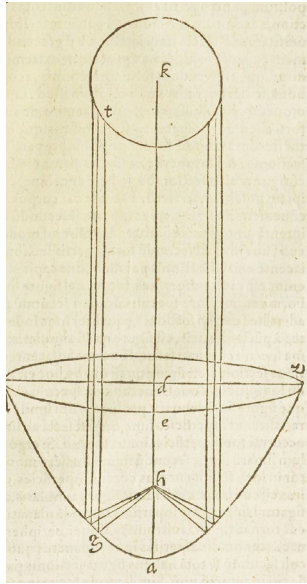


Fig. 9.2 Vitello, *Opticae Thesaurus*, ed. Federico Risnero (Basil: Episcopios, 1572), 401.

This line of thinking was not unique to Wycliffe or to England. A contemporary Irish Cistercian taught that the consecrated host was only a mirror to the body of Jesus in heaven.<sup>99</sup> In 1501, a Jewish woman who had converted to Christianity in Roa de Duero, Spain, refused to believe in the divine presence, arguing that the host on the altar was merely an “image” (*figurança*) of the divine.<sup>100</sup>

### *In Wycliffe’s Wake*

In England, the Lollards following Wycliffe, spiritually and chronologically, went further, understanding the Eucharist as merely a sign. Not inclined to see symbolic meaning in the material, the Lollards instead emphasized the division between the material and spiritual.<sup>101</sup>

Some popular opinions in England and Ireland evidently accepted the real presence, but doubted the specific requirements the Church held necessary

99 Walter Waddington Shirley, ed., *Fasciculi Zizaniorum Magistri Johannis Wyclif* (London: Longman, 1858), 353.

100 Carlos Carrete Parrondo, ed., *El tribunal de la Inquisición en el obispado de Soria (1486–1502)* (Salamanca: Universidad Pontificia, 1985), 146–47 (no. 358).

101 For example, Lincoln, Lincolnshire Archives Office, Episcopal Register 12, fol. 271v–72r.

for consecration. Richard FitzRalph, the Archbishop of Armagh (ca. 1300–60), taught that the words of consecration need not be in Latin.<sup>102</sup> In the 1390s, Walter Brut insisted that a priest was not necessary to consecrate the host: a devout layman, a woman, or even a little girl, could perform the mass.<sup>103</sup> In two separate incidents in London in that decade a child was taught to say mass, in the one case for his mother at the birth of a new sibling. A knight from Salisbury in the 1380s outrageously took the host “to go,” to eat at home, and in 1511 a woman and her sons did the same—perhaps they were hungry.<sup>104</sup> One Lollard imitated the sacrament to ostensibly transform the substance of a pig into fish, so that it could be licitly eaten on a Friday.<sup>105</sup> Each of these daring individuals broke up the deep-ken consonance linking language, attitude, performer, and location.

Others doubted the very consecration itself. In 1381 in Salisbury, the knight Laurence of St. Martin, impressed by radical Wycliffite ideas, defiantly took a consecrated host to his own home, locked the doors, and consumed it with oysters, onion, and wine; as punishment, the Bishop of Salisbury had him erect a stone cross in a public area, on which was engraved the story of his error.<sup>106</sup> Once, as a priest elevated the Eucharist, an onlooking Lollard admitted to the beautiful woman next to him that God was not as visible in the wafer as he was in her.<sup>107</sup> One William Colyn was condemned in 1430 for having said that he would rather see female genitals than the consecrated host. Colyn indignantly insisted that he had been misquoted, and that he actually had said he would rather *touch* the genitals than the host.<sup>108</sup> Was that radical theology, flirting, or both?

Less lusty doubters turned to numbers. In 1429, the Lollard Margery Baxter argued that “If every such sacrament were God, and the very body of Christ,

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102 This belief was ascribed to the archbishop by the Franciscan William Woodford (1330–1400), who was dubious, in Woodford’s *Quaestiones lxxii de sacramento altaris*, BodL MS Bodl. 703, fol 114r–19v.

103 BL MS Harley 31, fol. 194v–204v, 218r–223r. See Margaret Aston, “Lollard Women Priests?,” in Aston, *Lollards and Reformers: Images and Literacy in Late Medieval Religion* (London: Hambledon, 1984), 52–59.

104 Thomas Walsingham, *Historia Anglicana*, ed. Henry Thomas Riley, 2 vols. (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, and Green, 1863–64), I, 450–51, II, 307. See Hudson, *Premature Reformation*, 150–51.

105 Thomas More, *The Confutation of Tyndale’s Answer*, ed. Louis A. Schuster, Richard C. Marius, James P. Lusardi, and Richard J. Schoeck, 3 vols. (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1973), I, 122.

106 Thomas Walsingham, *The Chronica Maiora of Thomas Walsingham 1376–1422*, trans. David Preest (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2005), 118.

107 Thomas Waldensis, *Doctrinale antiquitatum fidei Ecclesiae Catholicae*, 2 vols. (Venice: Iordanum Zilettum, 1621), II, fol. 47r (ch. 26).

108 Norman P. Tanner, ed., *Heresy Trials in the Diocese of Norwich, 1428–31* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1977), 91.

there should be an infinite number of gods, because that a thousand priests, and more, do every day make a thousand such gods, and afterwards eat them, and void them out again in places, where, if you will seek them, you may find many such gods."<sup>109</sup> Richard Petefyne, busted for proposing a limit to the amounts priests might charge for the mass, told his inquisitors in 1491 that the sacrament was merely dough baked and pressed, which he could mass produce at a rate of thirty-one per hour. A mouse, he adds, would not dare to touch or eat it if it were truly the body of Jesus.<sup>110</sup> This plain-ken approach delighted in mouse psychology as well as the ugly number thirty-one.

The authorities, threatened, fought back. Indeed, we know the details of the previous paragraphs only because the authorities investigated and recorded them. Baxter, mentioned above, was sentenced to flogging. Even an eleven-year-old boy was interrogated.<sup>111</sup> Lollards likely to be questioned had been advised to say that they believed the consecrated host was whatever Jesus wanted it to be, and let the authorities object to that; the authorities in fact obtained a copy of this advice, and marvelled at the deception.<sup>112</sup> The Franciscan friar Roger Dymmok (fl. 1370–1400) explained how the Lollards' materialist understanding of the Eucharist was socially apocalyptic: denying transubstantiation would destroy the Church's sacraments, the oaths of king, and the political conventions of people. Just as a man does not appear different after being crowned king, Dymmok continued, bread does not appear different after it becomes Jesus.<sup>113</sup> In 1380, William Berton, Chancellor of Oxford, set up a commission that condemned the teaching that the substance of bread and wine remained after consecration. Soon, Wycliffe fled Oxford, pawning his papal decretals—decisions that formed the body of canon law—to a pawnbroker who valued them more than he did. In May 1382, the Blackfriars Council at London condemned the belief that bread and wine survived consecration. William Courtenay, Archbishop of Canterbury (ca. 1342–96), then used the Council's condemnation to attack the Wycliffites at Oxford, who had initially rallied to Wycliffe's defence. Before 1382 was over, Oxford appeared free of the heresy. In 1384, at the elevation during the Holy Innocents mass, Wycliffe dropped, paralyzed, and died three days later, on the

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109 Foxe, *Acts and Monuments*, 668 [644].

110 Herbert Arthur Doubleday and William Page, *The Victoria History of the Counties of England: Hampshire and the Isle of Wight* (Westminster: Archibald Constable, 1903), 48.

111 Chippenham, Wiltshire and Swindon Archives, Reg. Audley, fol. 148v. See Hudson, *Premature Reformation*, 134.

112 Shirley, ed., *Fasciculi Zizaniorum*, 385.

113 Roger Dymmok, *Liber contra XII errores et hereses Lollardorum*, ed. H. S. Cronin (London: Wyclif Society, 1922), 130–31.

eve of the new year. Only at Constance would Wycliffe be formally condemned, as the Western Schism distracted the Church authorities until then.<sup>114</sup>

Defenders of the Eucharist against doubts could also rely on a plain-ken empiricism to prove Jesus's presence in the consecrated host. The Carthusian monk Nicholas Love (d. ca. 1424) insisted that Lollards erred in emphasizing reasoning over observed miracles. Some people could sense the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. He cited Jesus appearing in the Eucharist as the Christ Child to the Saint-King Edward the Confessor (ca. 1003–66) and in "a quantity of flesh all bloody" for Gregory the Great. The sacrament of the Eucharist, Love explained, happened "wonderfully & miraculously against man's reason." Miracles confirmed the truth of the Eucharist, but "here the Lollard laughs and scorns the holy church in allegiance of such miracles, holding them but as *maggetales* [mad tales?] and feigned illusions, and because of that he does not taste the sweetness of this precious sacrament nor feel the gracious working of it in himself. Therefore he does not allow what anyone else does." Love knew someone, and supposed there were others, who felt the Eucharist make his body "melting for joy as wax does before the hot fire." In contrast, the Lollards used their limited senses' inability to detect Jesus's presence as an excuse to abandon the orthodox understanding of the rite. This was worse than the sin of Judas, who believed in the orthodox (by 1400 standards) Eucharist even though Jesus the man was physically present next to the bread and wine, which would make the miraculous nature of the Eucharist harder to believe, for how can someone stand next to the bread he was in?<sup>115</sup>

### Innovations in Bohemia

Perhaps more than anywhere else, in Bohemia the various understandings of the Eucharist were fluid, nuanced, and exaggerated by their opponents. What, exactly, was the consecrated bread? Conservative urbanites who preferred not to antagonize Rome with adventurous eucharistology accepted the standard transubstantiation: the bread fully transformed into the body and blood of Jesus. Moderates believed in consubstantiation, which held that the consecrated bread, while still Jesus's body and blood, also remained bread; this belief was similar to, and perhaps an imported version of, Wycliffe's. The radical sacramentalists or figuratists held the bread to be, really, mere bread, but charged by the spiritual presence of Jesus, the meaning of which could be taken up by consuming the

114 Kenny, *Wyclif*, 57, 91–99; Paul Strohm, *England's Empty Throne: Usurpation and its Aftermath, 1399–1422* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1998), 50.

115 Nicholas Love, *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, ed. Michael G. Sargent (Exeter, UK: University of Exeter Press, 2004), 151–53.

bread. The radical radicals, the symbolists, taught that the bread was only bread, but could carry a symbolic weight.

The key to understanding these perspectives is to keep an eye not on the body of Jesus—the real presence of which both transubstantiation and consubstantiation accepted—but on the bread. In transubstantiation, the consecrated host had only the appearance of bread. While bread substantially becoming body was, miraculously, possible, having bread and body co-exist in the same location violated plain-ken spacetime and so was beyond the pale. In contrast, consubstantiation held the apparent bread to be real bread, regardless of the limitations of plain-ken spacetime. That is, transubstantiation's miracle was the disappearance of bread, while consubstantiation's miracle was the violation of spacetime. The radical radicals allowed neither miracle, and took up another aspect of the plain ken by reducing the Eucharist's symbolic power to human psychology.

On the far side of the radicals was Martin Huska (d. 1421). Huska reduced the Eucharist to a memorial meal, on a table decorated not with priestly trappings but with love. He held that Jesus was not in the Eucharist: Christ was in heaven, physically, and with the communicants themselves, spiritually. This last idea outraged Huska's enemies, who were concerned that this converted the communicants themselves into the body and blood of Jesus, and the paternoster's "Our Father who art in heaven" into "Our Father who art in us." In this, Huska was thinking with the plain ken, while his critics were thinking with the deep. To demonstrate the lack of Christ's presence in the Eucharist, and the emptiness of any ceremonial celebration of it, his followers would overturn monstrances and stomp on the consecrated hosts that fell from them. Huska mocked those who were "growing thin on the little piece of bread of the popish and heretical supper." Instead, "Christians should come together on feast-days [...] and, for perfection in love, eat what they want, and so to speak have a banquet [...] feasting and filling themselves up."<sup>116</sup>

### *Infant Communion*

Such extreme beliefs might be safely kept unuttered, but the Bohemian radicals also experimented with innovations in the scope of the implementation of the mass. These changes were visible, and outrageous to mainstream society.

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116 Laurentius de Brezowa, "Vavřinec z Březové Kronika Husitská," in *Prameny dějin českých: Fontes rerum bohemicarum*, ed. Jaroslav Goll, 8 vols. (Prague: Palacký, 1893), V, 454–63, 474. See Wagner, *Peter Chelcicky*, 59–63, 106–07; Howard Kaminsky, *A History of the Hussite Revolution* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2004), 424. The last quotation is Chelčický's paraphrase.

Matthias of Janov (d. 1393) asked why should children, baptized, be excluded from Communion?<sup>117</sup> Jakoubek of Stříbro (d. 1429) used patristic and medieval sources to justify this expansion, but cited in particular Jesus's words at Jn 6:53–54: “very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.”<sup>118</sup> Others pointed to the fact that Jesus had been incarnated as a baby, and specifically welcomed them, with “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them” (Mt 19:14).<sup>119</sup>

How the proponents of infant Communion used biblical support is instructive. Jakoubek turned to Jesus's words (“Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven”) and asked why the one group singled out by Jesus as exemplary was exactly the one excluded. He, too, made use of Jn 6:53–54, classifying it as a divine precept, universally binding, with the implication that other verses spoken by Jesus were not. The priest Jan Želivský (d. 1422), preaching on Jn 21, took an instance of Jesus feeding his disciples to construct a loose parallel implying that priests should feed children the Eucharist. In another sermon, Želivský appealed to a verse that out of context appeared highly relevant: “It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs” (Mt 15:26). In context, this was Jesus declining to help a foreign, Canaanite woman, one of the “dogs” of the verse. While in England critics tended towards a plain-ken attack on Eucharistic practice, here both Matthias and Želivský sought a reform of the Eucharist on deep-ken grounds, by deriving doctrine from Jesus's apparently casual reference to children or from the fact that Jesus was himself born a baby.<sup>120</sup>

Frequent and infant Communion saw considerable success in Bohemia. Jan Jenstejn (1348–1400), Archbishop of Prague, approved frequent adult Communion. By 1417, the key texts adorned the walls of the Bethlehem Chapel, and a general Communion that even included infants was practised. A 1418 synod accepted twenty-three articles, with infant Communion in the first place. That first article included detailed instructions, suggesting that the practice was not yet widely implemented.<sup>121</sup>

117 Matthias of Janov [Matěj z Janova], *De Corpore Cristi*, ed. Jana Nechutová, *Regulae Veteris et Novi Testamenti* 6 (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1993), 36–41 (chs. 8–12).

118 Jacobellus de Misa [Jacob of Mies], *De communione plebis sub utraque species*, in Hermann von der Hardt, *Magnum oecumenicum Constantiense concilium*, 6 vols. (Frankfort: Gensch, 1698), III, col. 422 (part 1, ch. 2).

119 Noemi Rejchrtová, “Hussitism and Children,” *Communio Viatorum* 22 (1979): 201–04 (202).

120 Holeton, “Communion,” 213–16.

121 Palacký, ed., *Documenta*, 677–81; Holeton, “Communion,” 209, 213.

Infant Communion's opponents fought back. Opposition thinkers tended to lack gospel support for their position, but rather pointed out the political, and perhaps the social, danger of the practice. In his 1415 Eucharist treatise, Andrew of Brod included a short chapter on the dangers of infant Communion. Royal authority remained steadfastly opposed. Želivský compared the opposition to the gospels' Pharisees, who threatened anyone who recognized Jesus as the Messiah with expulsion from the synagogue, and argued, perhaps not entirely in jest, for extra-episcopal Communion—that everyone *except* bishops be allowed to participate.<sup>122</sup>

After 1420, the debate on infant Communion continued, with mainstream Bohemian theologians supporting it. The Four Articles (1421) included "all true Christians," and at Caslav later that year the intent behind the "all" was spelled out as both "old and young." The debate attracted the attention of the Council of Basel. In Bohemia, the practice would become established enough that Holy Roman Emperor Ferdinand I's (1503–64) efforts to end it failed. Even after the seventeenth-century return of Roman Catholicism, attacks were still made against infant Communion, which implies that the practice continued.<sup>123</sup>

Just as intense inclusion in the communicant community marked social and material changes in the life of the ex-prostitutes at New Jerusalem, so too the inclusion of children in Communion marked an inclusion of children in society more generally. It is ironic that one of the most complete emancipations of children—maybe "juvenile adults" is more precise—happened in a society often especially cruel to children. Hard sorrows surrounded the joys of Communion, and its bloody social debut. Participation in Communion perhaps facilitated participation in the Hussite armies—Jan Zizka (ca. 1360–1424) armed children with slingshots—and children, as young as seven years old, shared Jan Hus's (ca. 1370–1415) fate at the stake in the years following his death. Even as non-combatants, they filled the role of the innocents to Emperor Sigismund's (1368–1437) Herod, as the imperial armies did not share the Hussites' aversion to killing women and children. Petr Chelčický (ca. 1390–1460) objected precisely to this juxtaposition of violence and the Eucharist, for Jesus "did not command the church to put his body on display before the motley crowd as to a herd of cattle, nor did he say to parade it through city streets or carry it before an army mounted on a pike."<sup>124</sup>

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122 Jn 9:22; Holeyton, "Communion," 212–16.

123 Holeyton, "Communion," 207, 217.

124 Rejchrtová, "Hussitism and Children," 202–03; Wagner, *Peter Chelcicky*, 115.

## Desecrations

The most extreme critical stances were expressed not only in words, but in action, in the desecration of the consecrated hosts. Church officials took measures against blasphemous or irregular uses of the Eucharist. In late-fifteenth-century Denmark, authorities required priests to keep the hosts carefully locked, for fear of their misuse in magical “imminent dangers.”<sup>125</sup> One late-fourteenth-century Icelandic chronicle remember a nun from Kirkjubaer executed in 1343 for throwing the consecrated host into the toilet.<sup>126</sup> The frequently told story of a pig executed in Mortain, Normandy, in 1394 for eating a consecrated host appears to be a modern myth perpetuated by research error, but its persistence suggests that historians consider such an execution plausible in that society.<sup>127</sup>

The groups most often associated with host desecration in the fifteenth-century mind were the Jews, and the recent Jewish converts (*conversos*) to Christianity. Authorities took seriously any affront to the Eucharist’s honour. We can consider the cases of two Sicilians. One, when at Communion, pretended to vomit. Another, observing a house being cleaned before the arrival of the host, sarcastically asked, “Is a count or a baron coming here?” Even we can see the humour in the dissonance; each mocked the host because it was just as dissonant with his world-view as the authorities found desecration dissonant with their own. Both men were executed, and died while saying “Jesus.”<sup>128</sup>

More aggressively, Jews were “known” to have attacked consecrated hosts, which could sometimes miraculously defend themselves, or to have crucified babies. The vast majority of cases were in central or eastern Europe, but some occurred in Iberia.<sup>129</sup> In 1491, in southern Castile, a *converso* group was tried

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125 G. J. Thorkelín, *Samling af Danske Kirke-Love* (Copenhagen: Godisches Arvingers, 1781), 108.

126 Mitchell, *Witchcraft and Magic*, 122, 171.

127 I have not found a source for this prior to E. P. Evans, *The Criminal Prosecution and Capital Punishment of Animals* (London: Heinemann, 1906), 156, which scholars frequently cite. Evans may have confused the 1394 case of a sow in Mortain which ate a child. See Émile Agnel, *Curiosités judiciaires et historiques du moyen âge: Procès contre les animaux* (Paris: J. B. Dumoulin, 1858), 8.

128 Nadia Zeldes, *The Former Jews of this Kingdom: Sicilian Converts after the Expulsion, 1492–1516* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 175–76, 318–21.

129 From 1400 to 1800 the frequency of Jews being executed for host desecration halved, but this long continued, with the last known case happening in nineteenth-century Romania. Isidore Loeb, *La situation des israélites en Turquie, en Serbie et en Roumanie* (Paris: J. Baer, 1877), 143; Christopher Ocker, “Ritual Murder and the Subjectivity of Christ: A Choice in Medieval Christianity,” *The Harvard Theological Review* 91 (1998): 153–92 (165).



for desecrating the host and fatally crucifying a “Holy Child” of La Guardia.<sup>130</sup> This reverberated in art and literature. In Italian paintings, horrific accounts of infanticide—such as Vincent Ferrer’s (1350–1419) re-assembly of a child chopped and cooked up by his mother, or the case of the three-year-old Simon (1472–75) allegedly murdered by the Jews of Trent—appeared in the guise of representations of the Eucharist, with the child victim located in or near the place of the host or wine on the altar.<sup>131</sup>

In England, the Croxton Play of the Sacrament (ca. 1490s) dramatized some of these issues and fears, perhaps as an indirect criticism of the Lollards. In the play, Jews hire a Christian to drug a priest and steal a consecrated host, which they torture. In its defence, the host attaches itself to the hand of one of the torturers, a merchant, who is then forced to amputate it. The Jews then crucify the host-and-hand and place it in an oven. At this point, Jesus decides he has had enough. He emerges from the oven to condemn the Jews, who collapse to the floor and convert. Jesus restores the hand of the now ex-Jewish merchant. Church authorities intervene to certify the miracle and the conversion, and they all live happily ever after.<sup>132</sup>

Historians today assume that many, or even all, of such accusations against Jews were false. Certainly, the broad social hostility against Jews means we must discount, if not dismiss, the charges against them. Most likely Jews and *conversos*, like Christians descendant from Christians, had multiple understandings of the Eucharist, and would interact with it in multiple ways. Their Jewish heritage gave them a special vantage point. One Spanish *converso* considered the Eucharist with the plain ken and sought to explain its strangeness as a development in history. He concluded that it was in fact a Jewish ceremony augmented by the purely Christian elevation. That gave him new reason to doubt the presence of God in

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130 Fidel Fita, “La verdad sobre el martirio del Santo Nino de la Guardia,” *Boletín de la Real Academia de la Historia* 11 (1887): 7–134; Yitzhak Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1966), II, 398–423.

131 Roberto Rusconi, “Anti-Jewish Preaching in the Fifteenth Century and Images of Preachers in Italian Renaissance Art,” in *Friars and Jews in the Middle Ages*, ed. Stephen J. McMichael (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 225–37 (229–32), [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047400219\\_015](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047400219_015); Laura Ackerman Smoller, *The Saint and the Chopped-Up Baby: The Cult of Vincent Ferrer in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2016).

132 John T. Sebastian, ed., *Croxton Play of the Sacrament* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv13843dg>. See Cecilia Cutts, “The Croxton Play: An Anti-Lollard Piece,” *Modern Language Quarterly* 5 (1944): 45–60; Norman Davis, ed., *Non-Cycle Plays and Fragments* (London: Oxford, 1970), 379; C. J. Gordon, “Bread God, Blood God: Wonderhosts and Early Encounters with Secularization,” *Genre* 44 (2011): 105–28, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00166928-1260161>

the consecrated host: “That I can’t believe for the world, nor do I know where they can prove it—there is nothing of this in the old law.” He then reasoned from its absence in Jewish tradition to its absence in all traditions, concluding, “I can’t believe that for the world, nor is there a law in this world where such appears.”<sup>133</sup>

## Eucharist Miracles

As we will see through the course of this book, people did not have to rely on faith alone to believe in the efficacy of the mass. Eucharistic miracles repeatedly proved, against Christian and Jewish doubters, that what appeared as bread was in fact the body of Jesus.

Many of the Eucharistic miracles were educational, in that they taught that Jesus really was present in the consecrated host. In one instance, a mixed lay and clerical procession marched barefoot through London to hear a sermon against heresy, and the knight Cornelius Cloyne—rumoured to be Wycliffite—saw the bread become “true flesh, raw and bloody,” with “the name of Jesus written in letters of flesh, raw and bloody” on it, thus affirming the sermon’s message.<sup>134</sup> Alternatively, the French abbess Colette of Corbie (1381–1447) (Nicole[te] Boellet or Boylet) on one occasion did *not* see Jesus in an apparently consecrated host: she could sense that the priest had mistakenly used water instead of wine, and declined to worship it.<sup>135</sup> At Sergius of Radonezh’s (1314–92) Trinity Lavra outside of Moscow, during one mass the consecrated wine exploded, with the consequent fireball disappearing into the chalice before the priest drank from it.<sup>136</sup> At Lanciano in central Italy were preserved five pieces of congealed Eucharistic wine-turned-blood, any subset of which had the identical weight as the complete set.<sup>137</sup>

In the Basilica di Sant’Antonio, Padua, the high altar featured a series of low-relief depictions by Donatello (ca. 1386–1466) of miracles performed by the thirteenth-century Anthony of Padua, including one of the Miracle of the Ass: a donkey which had been starved for three days preferred to kneel before the consecrated host rather than eat it, or even the oats offered as an alternative.

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133 Carrete Parrondo, *El tribunal*, ed., 70–71.

134 Henry Knighton, *Knighton’s Chronicle, 1337–1396*, ed. and trans. G. H. Martin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 262–63.

135 Pierre de Vaux, *Vie de soeur Colette*, trans. Élisabeth Lopez (Saint-étienne: Publ. de l’Université de Saint-étienne, 1994), 111.

136 Dmitrij Ciževskij, *History of Russian Literature: From the Eleventh Century to the End of the Baroque* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1971), 175.

137 Bruno Sammaciccia, *Il miracolo eucaristico di Lanciano* (Lanciano: Botolini, 1984).

Writers would collect lists of such miracles to support their theological positions. Beyond demonstrating the presence of Jesus, miracles showed that the consecrated host was:

1. powerful

Around 1385 in Scandinavia a couple trying to have a baby consulted a demonologist, who in turn summoned a number of devils for further consultation, including one wearing a crown. At that moment, a priest with a consecrated host walked past, forcing the crown off the devil and the devil to his knees. The devil admitted the power of Jesus, and the couple decided not to gamble their souls on risky fertility methods.<sup>138</sup>

2. indestructible

During the Easter mass in 1513, at Catania Cathedral in Sicily, the tailor Giovan Battista Rizo seized the host, and attempted to shred it. Miraculously, despite his efforts, the host was undamaged. Rizo, on the other hand, was dragged by a mob to the piazza before the church and burned alive. One source mentioned that he was a *converso*, from a family of converted Jews, but explained the desecration as a moment of madness—with the mob later regretting their murder, since Rizo was normally such a nice fellow.<sup>139</sup>

3. unlose-able

In Swabia, the stigmatist virgin Elsbeth of Reute (1386–1420) devoted herself to asceticism and the Passion of Jesus. She was tormented by the devil, who, to make it look like Elsbeth was secretly breaking her long fasts, would steal food from the kitchen and hide fabricated feces in her room. This demonstrates the limits of empirical inquiry in a context where an intelligent malevolent being could manufacture precisely the most damaging evidence against you at will. On another occasion, her confessor was climbing the stairs with four hosts to serve Elsbeth and three other nuns, when “I had great fright and trembled with my whole heart”—the fourth host was missing. He searched frantically, in vain, before returning to Elsbeth for consolation and advice. When he entered her room, she laughed, saying,

I know well what upsets you and what you seek, you have sought the holy sacrament: that I have received from my husband Christ the son of God, and I have also seen him in his heavenly nature

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<sup>138</sup> Mitchell, *Witchcraft and Magic*, 62.

<sup>139</sup> Giovanni Di Giovanni, *L'ebraismo della Sicilia* (Palermo: Giuseppe Gramignani, 1748), 273–74.

and I have also seen a number of angels and many saints, who stood around him and served him, and he has himself fed me spiritually with the sacrament. Therefore be not disturbed or sorry!<sup>140</sup>

### Bleeding Hosts

In the most prominent miracles, the consecrated hosts bled, sometimes to demonstrate that they were actually flesh, and sometimes in the course of effecting other miracles. In fact, the blood specifically indicated that this flesh was Jesus's, for a tradition, espoused for example by the mystic Mechthild of Magdeburg in the thirteenth century, insisted that Jesus's wounds bled eternally.<sup>141</sup>

A number of earlier miraculously bleeding hosts still commanded memories and devotion in 1400.

During the Christian reconquest of Iberia, near Valencia, in the thirteenth century, some hosts became bloody during a mass; they were displayed in the subsequent battle, and the Muslims were defeated. Afterwards, to mediate disagreement about who should possess the bloodied hosts, they were given to a mule, who, with covered eyes, wandered for days, over 300 km, up to the door of the St. Mark Church in Daroca, where she kneeled. That church took possession of the hosts.<sup>142</sup>

In Bolsena, central Italy, a host had bled onto its corporal (the white cloth placed under the host and chalice during the mass), which was later transported to Orvieto. In some accounts, the bleeding host solved the doubts about transubstantiation in the mind of the officiating foreign (suspiciously, possibly Bohemian) priest. In others, it inspired Pope Urban IV (ca. 1195–1264) to establish the Corpus Christi feast.<sup>143</sup> Fourteenth-century images in the chapel

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140 The confessor is Konrad Kùgelin of Waldsee (1364–1428), who wrote the biography of Elsbeth Achler (1386–1420) in 1421. Bihlmeyer, "Die schwäbische Mysterikerin," 105–07.

141 Caroline Walker Bynum, *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in late Medieval Germany and Beyond* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Philadelphia Press, 2007), 188.

142 John of Capistrano, "Tractatus de Christi sanguine pretioso," in Natale Cocci, ed., "Il Sangue di Cristo in San Giovanni da Capestrano: Problema storico-teologico," *Sangue e antropologia nella teologia medievale* 3 (1991): 1381–84 (16); Gaspar Miguel de la Cueva, *Historia del divino mysterio, del sanctissimo sacramento de los Corporales de Daroca* (Zaragoza: Escarilla, 1590). A description by a hostile witness is in Antonio Gavin, *A Master-Key to Popery* (Dublin: Grierson, 1724), 230–32. See José Luis Corral Lafuente, "Una Jerusalén en el Occidente medieval: la ciudad de Daroca y el milagro de los Corporales," *Aragón en la Edad Media* 12 (1995): 61–122.

143 Because there are no extent references to this before the fourteenth century, this is unlikely. Kirsten Van Ausdall, "Art and Eucharist in the late Middle Ages,"

at Orvieto illustrate the story and other host accounts, with Muslims kneeling and children appearing in the place of miraculous hosts. By the fifteenth century, miracle plays describing the bleeding had appeared.<sup>144</sup> In 1513, Raphael (1483–1520) executed a painting of the bleeding for Pope Julius II (1443–1513), including the prelate among the onlookers.<sup>145</sup>

In Brussels, on Good Friday, 1370, Jews allegedly stabbed hosts, which had been obtained by bribing a *converso*, and they bled copiously. Before the Jews could transfer them to Cologne, where the ritual might be repeated, another *converso* betrayed them, and the hosts were taken into Church custody. The guilty Jews were burned alive, and the city's other Jews exiled.<sup>146</sup>

In 1433, Pope Eugene IV (1388–1447) gave what would be called the Bleeding Host of Dijon to Duke Philip the Good of Burgundy (1396–1467). This host had an image of Jesus in Judgment, and bled from its hands and feet, and from the Arma Christi, the tools used to torture Jesus. Growing into a national cult, it became understood to be the result of a Jewish attack on the host—an attack Eugene did not mention, so perhaps a late addition to the story—and protected Dijon from disease and war.<sup>147</sup>

Let us now consider the most controversial Eucharistic miracle. In 1383, the knight Heinrich von Bülow expressed his grievances against the Bishop of Havelberg by burning down Wilsnack, a village in that diocese. Among the smouldering rubble, three hosts on a corporal were discovered on what was left of the altar. Neither the fire nor the subsequent rain had damaged them in any way. The centre of each had a drop of blood. A dream, or angelic voice, told the local priest to find them. A series of miracles followed: candles ignited and extinguished themselves without human intervention, and there were healings, and even resurrections. Naturally, a cult developed. The Bishop of Havelberg

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in *A Companion to the Eucharist in the Middle Ages*, ed. Ian Christopher Levy, Gary Macy, and Kristen Van Ausdall (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 582–96, [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004221727\\_015](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004221727_015)

144 Miri Rubin, *Gentile Tales: The Narrative Assault on Late Medieval Jews* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 163–72.

145 Raphael, *The Mass at Bolsena* (1512–14), Apostolic Palace, Vatican City, Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Raphael\\_-\\_The\\_Mass\\_at\\_Bolsena.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Raphael_-_The_Mass_at_Bolsena.jpg)

146 John of Capistrano, “Tractatus,” 1378–80 (15.A); Etienne Ydens, *Histoire du Sacrement de Miracle* (Brussels: Velpius, 1605); Luc Dequeker, “Le Sacrement de Miracle: Notice historique,” in *Le trésor de la cathédrale des Saints Michel et Gudule à Bruxelles*, ed. Anne van Ypersele de Strihou (Brussels: [Cathédrale des Saints Michel et Gudule], 2000), 13–19.

147 Roger S. Wieck, “The Sacred Bleeding Host of Dijon in Books of Hours,” in *Quand la peinture était dans les livres: Mélanges en l’honneur de François Avril*, ed. Mara Hofmann, Eberhard König, and Caroline Zöhl (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2007), 393–404, <https://doi.org/10.1484/m.ars-eb.3.48>

was concerned that the hosts might be unconsecrated—that in fact this was not a Jesus cult but a bread cult—and came to consecrate them, but one host bled profusely to demonstrate the redundancy of such an action.<sup>148</sup>

Within the next two years the pope and regional bishops issued indulgences to fund the reconstruction of the destroyed village church. Within a decade the stream of pilgrims had grown to the point that authorities set up a formal division of the revenue from pilgrim-badges sales, with only one third finding its way to the village church's reconstruction expenses.

Although Wilsnack was unusual in that a knight, rather than a Jew, was blamed for the initial outrage, this kind of event was not uncommon, and subsequently every few decades a new bloodhost cult would start in Europe, alongside a far fewer number of wine miracles. In 1492 at Sternberg, a priest had allegedly pawned to Jews a cooking pot and then recovered it by paying them with consecrated hosts. The Jews stabbed them until blood spurted, although the hosts proved to be indestructible. They were buried, but later recovered and found to work miracles, healing the sick and raising the dead. Twenty-seven of the sixty-five Jews who admitted their guilt were executed, the rest exiled. A pilgrimage developed around the miraculous hosts, and within four years enough money had been raised to build a chapel, which still houses the table on which the hosts lay as they were stabbed. That cult withered under the attack of the Reformers in the 1520s. In Knoblauch, 40 km west of Berlin, in 1510, a tinker allegedly stole a monstrance and sold the hosts it contained to a Jew. As at Sternberg, these hosts proved indestructible despite being tortured. Thorough investigation eventually led to the execution of dozens of Jews. The local bishop moved the host to Berlin, but no cult developed, despite no lack of trying.<sup>149</sup>

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148 Hartmut Boockmann, "Der Streit um das Wilsnacker Blut: Zur Situation des deutschen Klerus in der Mitte des 15. Jahrhunderts," *Zeitschrift für Historische Forschung* 9 (1982): 385–408; Ernst Breest, "Das Wunderblut von Wilsnack, 1383–1552," *Märkische Forschungen* 16 (1881): 132–302; Morimichi Watanabe, "The German Church Shortly before the Reformation: Nicolaus Cusanus and the Veneration of the Bleeding Hosts at Wilsnack," in *Reform and Renewal in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. Thomas M. Izbicki and Christopher M. Bellitto (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 210–23.

149 "Anordnung des Bischofes Johann von Havelberg," in *Codex diplomaticus Brandenburgensis*, ed. Adolph Friedrich Riedel, 41 vol. (Berlin: Morin, 1842), II, part 1, 143–44. See Fritz Backhaus, "Die Hostienschändungsprozesse von Sternberg (1492) und Berlin (1510) und die Ausweisung der Juden aus Mecklenburg und der Mark Brandenburg," *Jahrbuch für Brandenburgische Landesgeschichte* 39 (1988): 7–26; Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, 26, 68–69, 93; Volker Honemann, "Die Sternberger Hostienschändung und ihre Quellen," in *Kirche und Gesellschaft im Heiligen Römischen Reich des 15. und 16. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Hartmut Boockmann (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1994), 75–102; Heiko A. Oberman, *The Roots of*

## Debate on the Blood-Host Cults

Debates raged over these cults. Although a bloodcult's best defence was a friend in high places, actual arguments were sometimes made. The Irish poet Tadhg Óg Ó hUiginn (ca. 1370–1448) wrote that no blood remained in Jesus's body after his death.<sup>150</sup> Some Franciscans proposed that Jesus did not need all of his blood in his glorified body, so perhaps he donated some blood for these miracles.<sup>151</sup>

A dubious bloodcult could be re-framed as a universally acceptable cult of the Eucharist. Pilgrimage encouraged devotion and peace.<sup>152</sup> Pope Nicholas V (1397–1455) defended a bloodcult promoted by the Franciscans at La Rochelle on the grounds of consistency with truth and tradition, and because it encouraged mass devotion.<sup>153</sup> In 1503, Johannes von Paltz (d. 1513) pointed out that contemporary dangers to orthodoxy, especially from the Poor Waldensians and the Bohemians, might have encouraged God to effect the miracle: "For when the blood flows from the host, our faith is confirmed against their errors, since we believe that true blood is contained not only in the chalice but also in the host." The bloodcult might thus discourage the Waldensian Poor from participating in the Eucharist. One scholar could believe the miraculous bleeding but nevertheless appreciated the difficulty in separating the truth from the legend—and indeed Albert Krummendiek (1417–89), Bishop of Lübeck, insisted on documentation when evaluating blood relics.<sup>154</sup>

To get a better sense of how such controversies could play out, let us return to Wilsnack, the controversy over which was both prominent and copiously recorded. Accounts of the Wilsnack miracles were written down in the early fifteenth century and printed in the 1520s.

Sometimes the debate was local and physical. To cure his withered hand, one pilgrim left a silver hand as an ex-voto at the Wilsnack shrine. When he later,

*Anti-Semitism in the Age of Renaissance and Reformation* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1984), 97–99; Van Ausdall, "Doubt," 518, 529.

150 Salvador Ryan, "'Scarce Anyone Survives a Heart Wound': The Wounded Christ in Irish Bardic Religious Poetry," in *Wounds and Wound Repair in Medieval Culture*, ed. Larissa Tracy and Kelly DeVries (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 291–312 (298), [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004306455\\_015](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004306455_015)

151 Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, 39, 166–68.

152 Livarius Oligier, "Johannes Kannemann, ein deutscher Franziskaner aus dem 15. Jahrhundert," *Franziskanische Studien* 5 (1918): 39–68 (46–47); Watanabe, "The German Church Shortly before the Reformation," 217.

153 From the Decree of August 19, 1449, in Henricus Denifle, ed., *Chartularium Universitatis Parisiensis*, 4 vols. (Lyons: Delalain, 1897), IV, 683–84.

154 Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, 34, 70–72, 94; Heinrich Finke, "Zur Geschichte der holsteinischen Klöster im 15. und 16. Jahrhundert," *Zeitschrift der Gesellschaft für Schleswig-Holstein-Lauenburgische Geschichte* 13 (1883): 143–248 (169).

uncured, heard the priest claiming that silver hand as evidence of a miraculous cure, he raised his still withered hand up to rebut him: “O priest, why are you lying?”<sup>155</sup>

The Archbishop of Prague became concerned that so many of his flock were travelling 400 km to participate in this dubious Wilsnack cult. In 1403, he set up a special commission to investigate. One member was Jan Hus, who collected data by interviewing returning pilgrims. Were the clergy of Havelberg taking advantage of the gullible faithful? Were similar bloodcults in the Italian and Polish lands also fraudulent?<sup>156</sup>

Hus explained that people should not be encouraged to believe that Jesus’s body and blood were visible, rather than merely edible, during the mass. Ideally, Christians should content themselves with faith, for, Hus quoted Jesus, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet come to believe” (Jn 20:29). The demand that invisible things be made visible compromised that faith. He railed against a “people incredulous and perverse” who needed physical proof, calling them “unbelieving Jews [who] seek visible signs: first affecting with bodily eyes to see [Jesus] in the host and to make his blood flow, just as they sought on the cross his divinity with nails, crown, and lance.” After the Resurrection, every part of Jesus’s body came together again according to the *optimam armoniam* [best harmony].<sup>157</sup> Except for the blood that exists sacramentally—and really, but not materially—in host and wine, “Today the faithful of Christ should not venerate Christ’s blood or hair existing anywhere locally and visually on the earth.”<sup>158</sup> Hus went on to say that all the Jesus relics (nails, thorns, clothing, his foreskin in Rome, his mother’s milk in Prague) existed similarly—really and sacramentally but not materially. This had consequence for our own salvation, for if Jesus was not intact in heaven now, would we too be dismembered when we were resurrected? “We cheerfully await our blood’s glorification, even if for our Lord Jesus Christ we pour it out for to be drunk by dogs.”<sup>159</sup>

Certainly, Hus admitted, God could have affected the Wilsnack miracle through his absolute powers: he could even have made faux visible blood appear on a host as a memorial to the real invisible blood. His plain ken, however, effectively limited God to his ordained powers, which did not encompass the phenomenon at Wilsnack, where “the fetid clotted blood of a dead horse is

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155 Jan Hus, “Tractatus,” in *Opera Omnia*, ed. Václav Flajšhans, 3 vols. (Prague: Bursik, 1904), I, fasc. 3, 32–33 (14.45).

156 Fudge, *Magnificent Ride*, 65; Spinka, *John Hus*, 67–69.

157 Hus, “Tractatus,” 17–18 (7.21), 20–21 (8.27), 23 (8.30).

158 Jan Hus, “Questio de sangwine Christi,” in *Opera Omnia*, ed. Flajšhans, I, fasc. 3, 7 (4). See Spinka, *John Hus*, 67–69.

159 Hus, “Tractatus,” 17 (6.20).



venerated as the blood of Christ.” Jesus’s foreskin at Rome and his beard at Prague were not authentic. In the same line, Hus asked the practical questions: who would have been there to collect and preserve the foreskin, or Mary’s breast milk? Hus noted that priests had confessed their fraud in faking the bloodcult at Litomyšl, some 150 km east of Prague, where a priest dropped onto the host blood from a cut on his own hand. This did nothing to moderate his disgust for his fellow priests, whom he suggested should be drowned “like puppies in a sack.”<sup>160</sup>

For Hus, these cults dangerously distracted from the miracle of the host regularly consecrated by the ordinary parish priest. Relics distracted from the Eucharist. Cult priests distracted from the parish priest. Allowing only priests to drink the consecrated wine distracted from the awesomeness of the consecrated hosts. “Miraculous” hosts distracted from the miraculousness of every host.<sup>161</sup>

The Archbishop of Prague supported his commission’s conclusions and invited Hus to preach at the Prague synods in 1405 and 1407. The Archbishop and his priests would denounce the cult once a month, and he outlawed pilgrimages from Bohemia to Wilsnack.<sup>162</sup>

Few cared. Enthusiasm for the cult shot up for decades afterwards. Pilgrims came from Hungary, 900 km away, and from Novgorod, 1,500 km away.<sup>163</sup> Children ran away from home to visit the church. Some 100,000 pilgrims visited Wilsnack each year. Even the Pope, Eugene IV (1383–1447), ruled in 1446 that the Wilsnack bloodcult was legitimate, although to be safe he had them add another host that was known to have been recently consecrated.<sup>164</sup> Wilsnack stood alongside Jerusalem, Rome, Santiago de Compostela, and Aachen in the first rank of Christian pilgrimage destinations.<sup>165</sup> When the throngs returned home, they took memories and images of the cult with them. A church at Basel had an image depicting a secondary miracle, occurring when pilgrims returning

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160 Hus, “Tractatus,” 10–11 (2.8), 13–14 (4.11–12), 34 (14.48); Hus, “Questio,” 7 (4). See Spinka, *John Hus*, 67–69, 213.

161 Hus, “Questio,” 33–37.

162 Breest, “Das Wunderblut von Wilsnack,” 162–65.

163 Maria Starnawska, “Die Beziehungen des Königreichs Polen und des Herzogtums Litauen zu Wilsnack und die Christus-Reliquienverehrung im Spätmittelalter,” in *Die Wilsnackfahrt: Ein Wallfahrts- und Kommunikationszentrum Nord- und Mitteleuropas im Spätmittelalter*, ed. Felix Escher and Hartmut Kühne (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2006), 86–88.

164 Donald Sullivan, “Nicholas of Cusa as Reformer: The Papal Delegation to the Germanies, 1451–1452,” *Mediaeval Studies* 36 (1974): 382–428.

165 Charles Zika, “Hosts, Processions and Pilgrimages: Controlling the Sacred in Fifteenth-Century Germany,” *Past and Present* 118 (1988): 25–64 (49).

from Wilsnack, waylaid by bandits, witnessed their humble walking sticks transformed into swords. Dozens of bells featured images of the hosts in relief.<sup>166</sup>

Opposition intensified as well. Heinrich Tocke (d. 1454), from nearby Erfurt University, spent decades fighting the cult. In 1443, he went to Wilsnack to examine the hosts—after the worshippers had left the church, to avoid scandal—and found nothing but cobwebs. Supported by the Bishop of Magdeburg, Tocke gave a speech at the provincial synod there (June 1451), with an important visitor in attendance. Nicholas of Cusa, a legate for the new Pope, Nicholas V, was then doing a reform tour (see Chapter 13). Having heard Tocke, he travelled to Wilsnack, and attempted to end the cult for good. Cusa insisted that Jesus could not be divided up, partly in heaven and partly in Wilsnack; even during the three days between his death and Resurrection Jesus was still fully and completely human, and so all miracle hosts were false. Although “the clergy in their greed for money not only permit this but even encourage it through the publicizing of miracles,” nonetheless “the glorified body of Christ has glorified blood completely un-seeable in glorified veins.” His blood is “invisible in glorified veins,” not visible in mundane miracles. If the Wilsnack cult continued, Cusa threatened, participants would be excommunicated, and the church put under interdict. The Wilsnack clergy should not display the hosts, which were to be eaten during the celebration of a normal mass. Pilgrim badges should no longer be made.<sup>167</sup>

John of Capistrano (1386–1456) was also asked to weigh in on the matter, and composed *De Christi sanguine pretioso* [On the Precious Blood of Christ] (ca. 1440–42). His understanding can be seen as a collision between the deep and plain kens: the divine was immutable, and the human contingent; because of the perfect union of divine and human in Jesus, that human contingent participated in the divine immutable. A deep-ken sense of consonance required harmony between Jesus’s blood and the rest of him, for the part and the whole must have *congruentiam* [congruence] and *convenientiam* [accord], to avoid being *turpis* [ugly].<sup>168</sup> He, too, was dubious of Wilsnack. Capistrano argued that for it to be able to save us, the blood of God must be intact: Jesus’s blood, innocent, cannot

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166 Breest, “Das Wunderblut von Wilsnack,” 190; Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, 26–27, 43.

167 Erich Meuthen, ed., *Acta Cusana, Band I, Lieferung 3, Teilband A* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1996), 980–81; “Erzbischof Friedrich von Magdeburg publicirt das Verbot des Cardinal-Legaten Nicolaus von Cusa” (1452), in *Codex diplomaticus Brandenburgensis*, ed. Riedel, II, part 1, 152–56. See Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, 27, 126, 142; Rudolf Haubst, *Die Christologie des Nikolaus von Kues* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1956), 298–304; Watanabe, “The German Church Shortly before the Reformation,” 210–23.

168 This is a deep-ken perspective on two subjects, one itself deep ken (the divine immutable) and the other plain (the human contingent).

have been abandoned, since that separation would endanger the efficacy of the Eucharist. (He also explained that the purity of Mary's blood, which had never come into contact with sperm, allowed her to become pregnant with Jesus.)<sup>169</sup>

In the end, Nicholas of Cusa failed. The Bishops of Magdeburg and of Havelberg excommunicated each other. On the secular map, Wilsnack was located in Brandenburg, and, in 1453, its Elector Friedrich travelled all the way to Rome to get papal support. That year, Pope Nicholas undid all the excommunications and allowed the cult to continue, overruling the decree of his own legate. The new church, funded by the success of the cult, was completed a half-century later.<sup>170</sup>

Other blood-host cults ended when demonstrated to be fraudulent. In Leominster, in Herefordshire, during Henry VII's (1457–1509) reign (rl. 1485–1509) a woman ("strange wench") caged in an upper church gallery stopped eating and drinking, except for the host that floated to her mouth, borne by invisible angels. Investigation revealed a mechanism by which a thin hair was attached to the host to control its movement.<sup>171</sup> In another case, four Dominicans were executed in Bern in 1509 for faking the appearance of blood on hosts and a Mary statue that could gesticulate, weep, groan, speak, and cry blood. The novice Johann Jetzer (d. 1514) had been repeatedly fooled, so that he got "such a habit of incredulousness, that he would hardly believe his own eyes." This was itself considered dangerous. One local canon said that "if the testimony of our eyes could not be believed in this Cause, it would call in Question the truth of the bodily Presence of Christ in the Mass."<sup>172</sup> For this canon, the real presence was not invisible, but empirically visible with the eye.

Eventually, the debate over the Wilsnack cult ended, not with persuasion, but with violence fuelled in part by the German Reformation. Martin Luther (1483–1546) denounced it, and other blood host cults, in his *An den christlichen Adel deutscher Nation* [To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation] (1520). In 1552, the Lutheran pastor for Wilsnack burned the hosts, and was imprisoned.<sup>173</sup>

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169 John of Capistrano, "Tractatus," 1346–47 (3.A), 1349–50 (4.C.1), 1355–56, 1359–60 (6.C, 7.D), 1356–59 (7.A-C), 1367–68, 1377 (11.A.1–2, 14.A.1), 1371–72 (12.B). See Breest, "Das Wunderblut von Wilsnack," 255–74; Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, 116–18, 141–42, 158.

170 Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, 43.

171 Thomas More, *A Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, ed. Thomas M. C. Lawler, Germain Marc'hadour, and Richard C. Marius (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1981), 87.

172 William Waller, *The Tragical History of Jetzer* (London: Ponder, 1679), 20, 24; Romy Günthart, *Von den vier Ketzern: 'Ein erdocht falsch history etlicher Prediger münch' und 'Die war History von den vier ketzer prediger ordens.'* Edition und Kommentar (Bern: Chronos, 2009).

173 Breest, "Das Wunderblut von Wilsnack," 282–95.

## Envoi

Not everyone was impressed by careless enthusiasm for the Eucharist and the mass. Bernardino of Siena (1380–1444), so often accused of witchcraft and excess enthusiasm, was here a voice of restraint: he was annoyed by priests and those “damned old sorcerer women” who used the host for magical healing purposes.<sup>174</sup> He preached that preaching was more valuable than attending the mass, except on Sundays and obligatory holy days,<sup>175</sup> for one would not have faith in the mass if it were not for preaching.<sup>176</sup> In the Duchy of Burgundy, some children preferred to go to a local orchard to eat fruit rather than to the church to see the consecrated host of their lord and saviour. The Church excommunicated the orchard.<sup>177</sup>

The importance of the mass made it a decoration for important religious occasions, while its ubiquity sometimes brought it into other everyday contexts. A mass might be said before jousting, or jousting might be cancelled on the Easter holidays, presumably also to encourage church attendance.<sup>178</sup> It was not uncommon for the sacred and profane to thus mix: in 1385, Pope Urban VI (ca. 1318–89) read the liturgical Hours within shouting—or screaming—distance of the dungeon where he had ordered some rebel cardinals tortured.<sup>179</sup> Francis I of France (1494–1547) used the mass as an opportunity to flirt with women.<sup>180</sup> At the other extreme, proximity to the real presence of God could overwhelm sensitive souls. The young Luther had a panic attack as he celebrated his first mass.<sup>181</sup>

In 2020, a global pandemic moved the mass online. Priests performed the rite in empty churches under the judgmental eye not of God, but of webcams. Circumstances meant that lay people were once again reduced to ocular Communion. The human audience of this new stage in liturgical history had reverted back to one of the practices of 1400—frequent attendance at multiple

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174 Bernardino of Siena, *Opera omnia*, 9 vols. (Florence: Quaracchi, 1959), VII, 417.

See Franco Mormando, *The Preacher's Demons: Bernardino of Siena and the Social Underworld of Early Renaissance Italy* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 95–96.

175 Mormando, *Preacher's Demons*, 242.

176 Bernardino of Siena, *Le prediche volgari*, ed. Luciano Banchi, 3 vols. (Siena: Tip. edit. all'inseg. di S. Bernardino, 1880), I, 66.

177 Barthélémy de Chasseneux, *Consilia d. Bartholomaei à Chasseneo Burgundi iurisconsulti præstantissimi: Hedvænae ac Montiscinerii præfecturarum Regij aduocati* (Lyons: Nathanaelem Vincentium, 1588), fol. 17r.

178 Mortimer, *Fears*, 87–88.

179 Georg Erler, ed., *Theoderici de Nyem de scismate libri tres* (Leipzig: Veit, 1890), 94.

180 Francis Hackett, *Francis the First* (New York: Doubleday, 1935), 98.

181 Martin Luther, *Tischreden*, 6 vols. (Weimar: Hermann Böhlhaus Nachfolger, 1916), IV, 384 (4574).

masses. Some worshippers “hopped” from one mass to the next, globally, like flipping through television channels. Such mass-hoppers, however, were not maximizing spiritual benefits by repeated viewings, but were simply “sampling” them, to find the priest with the best “presentation skills.”<sup>182</sup> Christians today may thus be on the cusp of a new debate about how the mass is valuable. Concerns about frequent visual consumption, whether by runners in 1400 or hoppers in 2020, is only the tip of the iceberg. The complexity, centrality, and mystery of the Eucharist almost guarantees controversy.

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182 Fr. Brendan Hoban of the Association of Catholic Priests, quoted in Rory Carroll, “‘Mass Hoppers’ giving us Anxiety, say Irish priests,” *The Guardian* (10 November 2020), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/nov/10/ireland-catholic-priests-online-mass-reviews-causing-performance-anxiety>

## 10. Making Canon

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How do the two kens apply to scripture? In the plain ken, meaning tended to be constructed in history, by humans for humans, independent of other factors. In the deep ken, meaning is profoundly contextualized, independent of historical time, but dependent on consonance. For example, the deep ken would frown on you reading the Bible or Qur'an on your smart phone in the bathroom. If you want to understand it, you should read a high-quality edition with a serious and purposeful mindset. Beauty and truth buttressed each other. In contrast, the plain ken is not bothered: the scripture's meaning is the same, regardless of where or how you're reading it. In these centuries, toilets were a minor issue and phones were not an issue at all. What mattered then, in the deep ken, was the quality of the physical book—its materials, writing style, and decoration—and the quality of the language used. This chapter focuses on the material side of this issue—the next, “Interpreting Canon,” (Chapter 11) turns to the question of mindset in approaching scripture.

### Material

The first thing you would notice about Qur'ans in 1400 was their great size, which the deep ken associated with value. This was a peak after a century of large, multi-volume Qur'ans, and the fifteenth century would prefer normal sizes. Extremes still occurred. 'Umar al-Aqta' wrote a miniscule Qur'an in tiny script, small enough to fit inside a signet ring, to the extreme displeasure of the Emir Timur (1336–1405). The calligrapher's next attempt saw each page with a length of one *gaz* (60.6 cm) long.<sup>1</sup> Timur also liked long letters—sending a hundred-footer to Sultan al-Nasir Faraj (ca. 1386–1412) of Egypt—and big mosques—at Samarkand the Mosque of Bibi Khanum could hold 10,000 worshippers. Timur's grandson Baysunghur (1397–1433) wrote another Qur'an, reaching 177 x 101

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1 Pages from 'Umar al-Aqta' can be found at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/453985> and <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/453987>

cm. The Timurids were the greatest, but not the only, patrons of the huge. A contemporary Qur'an from Mamluk Egypt measured 117 x 98 cm. Such Qur'ans dwarfed even al-Qalqashandi's (1355/56–1418) system of classifying Qur'ans by size: his largest category, the "baghdadi" size, reached only to 100 x 70 cm, less than 40% the surface area of the Baysunghur exemplar.<sup>2</sup>

Traditionally, Qur'ans would be written on parchment (a luxurious word for the skins of dead animals) or, in western India, on palm leaves. Both had been largely replaced, despite cultural resistance, by a "new" invention. The ancient Chinese had invented a process for economically converting rags, rope, or wood into a writing surface. First, the materials were reduced into fibre pulp into which a mould was submerged. The result was glazed with size, a gelatinous solution perhaps made of starch and powdered rice, then rubbed or hammered to smooth out the texture, and then ruled by indenting a cotton-string frame onto the page. Beyond its economy, this was also attractive as a security device against forgers: absorbing ink well, it was hard to erase. The capture of Chinese prisoners during the An Lushan Rebellion (755–63) initiated or accelerated the movement of this wonder material into the Near West: Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406) reported that it had been manufactured in Baghdad from ca. 800 in response to a parchment shortage. Just before our period, it had even reached the Far West. In England it became known as "paper."<sup>3</sup>

Around 1400, the newfangled material was cheap enough to make significant inroads in the Far West market. In France, a piece of parchment was worth six sheets of paper in the fourteenth century, and twenty-five sheets in the fifteenth. Paper had become four times cheaper. Around 1400, one third of all manuscripts copied in France were on paper, as were two thirds of those copied in German and Italian lands, and 85% of those copied in the Swiss cantons.<sup>4</sup>

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- 2 Qāḍī Aḥmad Qummi, *Calligraphers and Painters*, trans. V. Minorsky (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1959), 64. See also Syed Barakat Ahmad, *Introduction to Qur'anic Script* (London: Routledge, 1999), 134; Sheila Blair, *Islamic Calligraphy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2006), 250–51, 265–68, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781474464475>; Sheila S. Blair and Johnathan M. Bloom, *The Art and Architecture of Islam 1250–1800* (London: Yale UP, 1994), 37; Clément Huart, *Les calligraphes et les miniaturistes de l'Orient musulman* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1908), 93–107, 252; Thomas W. Lentz and Glenn D. Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision: Persian Art and Culture in the Fifteenth Century* (Los Angeles, CA : Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1989), 14–23, 36–39; Annemarie Schimmel, *Calligraphy and Islamic Culture* (New York: New York University, 1984), 15, 24–25.
  - 3 Blair, *Islamic Calligraphy*, 45–49.
  - 4 Jonathan Bloom, *Paper before Print: The History and Impact of Paper in the Islamic World* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2001); Carla Bozzolo and Ezio Ornato, *Pour une histoire du livre manuscrit au Moyen Age* (Paris: CNRS, 1983), 31–37; Daniel Hobbins, *Authorship and Publicity before Print: Jean Gerson and the Transformation of Late Medieval Learning* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press,

From Europe, where water, an expensive resource in paper production, was in abundance, this cheaply made paper had been imported into North Africa for decades, and, in 1400, was being imported into Iraq and Persia for use even in Qur'ans. In our period, parchment was mostly recycled for use in Qur'an bindings. In Syria, one Qur'an was still made of parchment, for uncertain reasons—perhaps the projection of wealth, or for romantic nostalgia? Only in North Africa were parchment Qur'ans still being regularly produced. Western India in 1400 continued to use palm-leaves as a writing surface, but, within a century, these too were replaced by paper. For centuries later, even non-Muslims there cut the new paper to the old palm-leaf sizes.<sup>5</sup>

Soon, domestic paper production in Tlemcen and Fez would be wiped out under a tidal wave of cheap Italian imports. This created a new problem, in that the imported paper, if you looked closely, carried the watermarks of its manufacturer. These logos were sometimes specifically Christian, sometimes specifically derogatory: one large (1,000-folio) late-fifteenth-century Qur'an, for example, had on each page the subtle watermark of a cross standing victorious atop a crescent. A deep-ken eye would balk at the dissonance, while a plain-ken eye would see no meaning beyond economic realities. In Tlemcen, a deep-ken way was found to take advantage of the usefulness of the plain-ken approach: Ahmad al-Wansharisi (d. 1508) issued a fatwa that writing the Qur'anic truth over Christian untruth erased that untruth, and thus made even the most outrageous designs invisible, even if you could still see them.<sup>6</sup>

## Writing Styles

### Calligraphy

Writing was itself the principal element of decoration. While the scholar-poet-calligraphers of the Chinese core valued expressive uniqueness, the Qur'an calligrapher suppressed his (or her—we have records of female calligraphers, and families of calligraphers, most visibly in Safavid Shiraz) personality, took up not a brush but a more rigid pen, and wrote to maximize clarity and beauty

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2009), 7; Uwe Neddermeyer, *Von der Handschrift zum gedruckten Buch* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1998), 260–62.

5 Blair, *Islamic Calligraphy*, 44–46, 418; Jeremiah B. Losty, *The Art of the Book in India* (London: British Library, 1982), 11.

6 al-Wansharīsi, *Histoire et société en Occident musulman au Moyen Âge*, trans. Vincent Lagardère (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 1995), 42.



of the revealed Word through regular letters, done carefully, systematically, methodically.<sup>7</sup>

Calligraphy had long been a noble art. The famed calligrapher Yaqut al-Musta‘simi (d. 1298) was said to have copied the Qur’an over a thousand times. He was doing calligraphy when the Mongols took Baghdad, and, instead of evacuating, he merely relocated to a more secure minaret to continue. Many rulers in our period were accomplished students and patrons of calligraphy. The Timurids, conservatively, valued their cultural heritage going back through Timur to the Ilkhans and Yaqut. Timur’s son Shah Rukh (1377–1447) studied calligraphy under Sharafuddin of Yazd (d. 1454); his penmanship commanded the highest praise, that it could pass for Yaqut’s. Although less calligraphers in their own right, the Ottoman rulers showed great reverence to the art. Ahmed Karahisari (1469–1556), a calligrapher at Suleiman’s (1494–1566) court, famously drew a bismillah with a single breath and a single line, his pen never leaving the surface.<sup>8</sup>

The art’s nobility made it powerful and therefore dangerous. ‘Umar al-Aqta’, mentioned above, was one-handed, perhaps the result of royal displeasure. A calligrapher at the court of Mamluk al-Nasir Faraj had his right hand maimed by that sultan as punishment for using his calligraphy for magic; he took up calligraphy again, with the hand left to him, after the sultan had died.<sup>9</sup>

## Scripts

The basic forms of the Arabic alphabet are more homogenous than the Latin alphabet. To make them distinct from each other, Arabic letters need to have dots supplementing their basic forms; in the English alphabet only two letters (i and j) bear dots. About a quarter of Arabic letters do not connect with the following letters, a feature unusual in lower-case English cursive styles. Arabic writing thus is more homogenous in its base forms and more dependent on dots than the words on this page are.<sup>10</sup>

In the Near West, two scripts dominated Qur’an writing. The first was the powerful, angular *muhaqqaq* (“perfect” or “complete”); deep-ken appreciation

7 Blair, *Islamic Calligraphy*, liii, 7.

8 Ahmad, *Introduction to Qur’anic Script*, 122; Bloom, *Paper before Print*, 54–55, 82, 109, 156; Huart, *Les calligraphes*, 108–12.

9 Schimmel, *Calligraphy*, 55.

10 The best overviews are Solange Ory, “Calligraphy,” in *Encyclopedia of the Qur’an*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe, 6 vols. (Brill: Leiden, 2001), I, 278–86; Yasin Hamid Safadi, *Islamic Calligraphy* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1987), 7–17; Nabil Safwat, *Art of the Pen: Calligraphy of the 14<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries* (London: Azimuth Editions, 1996), 228–34.

for that perfection made it an especially frequent choice for Qur'ans. *Muhaqqaq* never dropped far below the line, which would sacrifice the impression of height and grandeur that the deep ken linked to importance. It was distinguished by its towering straight alif, with a distinctively hooked top, of a height equivalent to that of a stack of exactly eight (in Persia) or ten (in Egypt) dots. These alifs soared especially in the late fourteenth century among the Mamluks. The script was used in particular for the huge Qur'ans at the beginning of our period.<sup>11</sup>

The second script, which, in 1400, was about four centuries old, was *naskh* ("transcriptional"), a secretarial script more functional than beautiful, normally used for worldly writings. Because of the ease of writing and reading it, *naskh* was the most common script across all texts, and the second most common for Qur'ans. *Naskh* predominated in Ottoman lands.<sup>12</sup> *Naskh* had a maximum size, but no minimum—and indeed one form of *naskh*, called *ghubar* ("dust"), became so tiny as to be illegible to human eyes; it was originally designed for pigeon mail. A Qur'an in *ghubar* might squeeze twenty lines on a page, about twice the average in this period. One Qur'an in *ghubar* script from ca. 1300 measures 4 x 4 cm, in which the alif struggles to reach 2 mm in height. Why so small? The power of the Qur'an was independent of anyone being able to read it, and *ghubar* became a useful script for tiny portable Qur'ans that served as amulets that still contain the deep-ken truth of the Qur'an. These *ghubar* amulet Qur'ans, frequently octagonal, could be attached to military flags, and brought into battle—few have survived undamaged.<sup>13</sup>

Scripts also varied regionally. We are largely ignorant of Indian Qur'ans before 1400, perhaps because many were destroyed in Timur's attack on Delhi. Soon thereafter, India saw the rise of the crude, wedge-shaped *bihari*, with thick curved letter-endings, which might have been a local script that took up a life of its own when Timur disrupted ties to the west. Early in the fifteenth century, a variation of the stately yet stylish *thuluth* script became popular in India. In the Sinic Core, the flowing *sini* style evolved during the Ming Dynasty.<sup>14</sup>

11 Blair, *Islamic Calligraphy*, 319–21; Martin Lings, *The Quranic Art of Calligraphy and Illumination* (New York: Interlink, 1987), 100; Martin Lings and Yasin Hamid Safadi, *The Qur'ān: Catalogue of an Exhibition of Qur'ān Manuscripts at the British Library* (London: World of Islam Publishing, 1976), 48.

12 Blair, *Islamic Calligraphy*, 326, 476; Lings, *Quranic Art*, 53.

13 Blair, *Islamic Calligraphy*, 260, 481; Huart, *Les calligraphes*, 252; Abdelkhatibi Khatibi and Mohammed Sijelmassi, *The Splendour of Islamic Calligraphy* (New York: Rizzoli, 1976), 170; Lings, *Quranic Art*, 54; Qummi, *Calligraphers*, 64; Safadi, *Islamic Calligraphy*, 20.

14 Colin F. Baker, *Qur'an Manuscripts: Calligraphy, Illumination, Design* (London: British Library, 2007), 76–82; Blair, *Islamic Calligraphy*, 386–87; Losty, *Art of the Book*, 37–40; Barbara Stöcker-Parnian, "Calligraphy in Chinese Mosques: At the Intersection of Arabic and Chinese Calligraphy," in *Calligraphy and Architecture in*

Multiple scripts in a single Qur'an had long been used, but was not **common until our period. Kufic, thuluth, and ru'qah were almost always used in Qur'ans to offset display text for chapter titles and prostration instructions (for example, see the chapter titles in Shah Tahmasp I (1514–76)'s Qur'an, which is otherwise in nast'aliq).**<sup>15</sup> Even text not **highlighted in this way might switch between, say, thuluth and naskh,** just according to the spacing, without any relevance to the actual words **being used. The deep ken saw value in meaning in the beauty of the alternating scripts, and so a passage could swap scripts halfway through without disrupting its meaning or decorum.**<sup>16</sup>

In 1400, we see the beginning of a Timurid combined-script style: *thuluth* or *muhaqqaq* for the top, middle, and bottom sections of text, separated by lines of *naskh* or *rayhani*. Also fashionable was the thinnest pen in the biggest books. The Persians over the next two centuries would prefer the reverse, big chunks of *naskh* with intervening lines of *muhaqqaq* or *thuluth*. Calligraphy and calligraphers from Persia travelled to India and Turkey, influencing the encouragement of the use of script combinations in local production.<sup>17</sup>

As we go farther west, the writing styles become less complex. The primary script in the Far West was “black letter,” which today we sometimes call “Old English.” This was a heavy script in which smooth curves contrast with sharp, slender lines. With the rise of paper, black-letter cursive (that is, connected) styles in handwriting became popular and standardized, as they were faster to write on paper, which was smoother than parchment. In the fifteenth century, Italian humanists evaluated the beauty of scripts with a plain ken, by evaluating their clarity of expression and locating them historically: black letter, which they attributed to the Lombards and dismissed as “modern,” was inferior to what they called the “roman” script, believed to be ancient.<sup>18</sup> The roman script was an ancestor of the most common families of scripts in use today, including the one on this page.

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*the Muslim World*, ed. Mohammad Gharipour and Irvin Cemil Schick (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2013), 147–48. There's an outstanding Qur'an in Indian *thuluth* at the Rampur Raza Library.

- 15 Exceptionally, the main text of Lings and Safadi, *The Qur'ān*, 50 (no. 68) is in *thuluth*.
- 16 Ahmad, *Introduction to Qur'anic Script*, 133–34; Lentz and Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision*, 12; Lings and Safadi, *The Qur'ān*, 50.
- 17 Qummi, *Calligraphers*, 156; Lentz and Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision*, 12; Lings and Safadi, *The Qur'ān*, 74; Schimmel, *Calligraphy*, 66.
- 18 Hobbins, *Authorship and Publicity*, 7; Berthold Louis Ullman, *The Origin and Development of Humanistic Script* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1960).

## Decoration

### Qur'ans

Illustration did not work well in the Qur'an: an artist's visualization could only deface what had been revealed by God. What an artist thought he had created infringed upon God's monopoly on the act of creation. In any case, the Qur'an was not narrative enough to give illustrations much purchase. Illustration endangered the modesty of the artist and endangered the ability of the reader to engage the text without limitations on the imagination.<sup>19</sup>

Thus denied, exuberance instead manifested in calligraphy and in its illumination—not figurative but geometrical and floral—found on frontispieces, at surah headings (title of surah, number of verses it has, whether it was written in Mecca or Medina), and between individual verses or groups of five verses, places where prostration was advised. Repetition of decorative elements gave the written text a rhythm that echoed the recitation of the spoken text, done by humans as well as by angels, as in surah 37. As the Qur'an referred to itself as light and compared a "good word" to a "good tree" (14:24), so the many illuminated suns and trees reflected the content of the text. Rosettes or little suns divided verses. Illumination balanced abundant beauty with restraint—but Qur'an decoration tended to remain at least slightly asymmetrical, not for plain-ken awkwardness (see Chapter 14) but because in the deep ken only God was perfect.<sup>20</sup>

### Bibles

Some of this probably influenced some Christian Bibles. Non-representational illustration burnished the beauty, and therefore truth, of both Qur'ans and Bibles. Unexpected representational illustrations drew lines of meaning between Bible events distant from each other in the plain ken's chronological history. All such decorations had a fundamentally deep-ken value.

In the fourteenth century, Coptic gospels seem to have followed patterns of non-representational illustration from Mamluk Qur'ans. Many Bibles, like the vulgates made for private study, had only limited illustration. Others were more lavish. Illustrated Bibles came in a variety of formats. In general, they included short passages of text, supported by commentary and by images. The text was

<sup>19</sup> Lings, *Qur'anic Art*, 75.

<sup>20</sup> Baker, *Qur'an Manuscripts*, 73; Blair, *Islamic Calligraphy*, 418; Lings, *Qur'anic Art*, 75–76.

chosen with little regard for traditional text divisions. The earliest illustrated Bibles were illuminated manuscripts, but by the 1460s, if not earlier, some were printed with woodcut blocks or moveable type. Several distinctive types developed.<sup>21</sup>

*Bibles moralisée* [moralized Bibles] were produced for the French royal family. A half dozen of these survives from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and a single exemplar from the fifteenth.<sup>22</sup> The page layout is striking for its regularity. The basic visual unit consists of four pieces of text and two images. The first text is a paraphrase from the Vulgate Old Testament, partly a direct quotation but abbreviated and reworked—removing philologically interesting details—so that it can have a clear meaning even removed from its context. The second is a French translation of the first. The third and fourth are commentaries, in Latin and French respectively, linking the first texts to the life of Jesus. To the right of each pair of texts is an illustration, such that an Old Testament image stands directly above a related New Testament image, a relationship only clear to the deep ken. Four such units appear on each page. In one fifteenth-century version, for example, God’s instructing Moses on how to sacrifice (Lev. 1:1–3) is paired with an image of the Crucifixion, the commentary explaining that “all the various sacrifices prefigure Christ’s sacrifice.”<sup>23</sup> God’s giving Moses the Ten Commandments is paired with Jesus delivering the Sermon on the Mount.<sup>24</sup>

A similar kind of work was the poem *Speculum Humanae Salvationis* [Mirror of Human Salvation], developed in the early fourteenth century around the southern German-French border, but with a popularity enduring into our time. The *Speculum* was more prominent than the other Bible alternative versions discussed here; hundreds of manuscripts of the original Latin survive, as well as a few in vernacular languages. Many were made for Philip III the Good (1396–1467), grandson of the owner of the last moralized Bible. The text, perhaps written by Ludolph of Saxony (ca. 1295–1378), was drawn and adapted from diverse sources, including Thomas Aquinas (1225–74), the *Golden Legend*,

21 This is speculative, as no early Mamluk Qur’ans have survived. David James, *Qur’ans of the Mamlūks* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1988), 47, 149.

22 BnF MS Fr. 166. A facsimile edition has been published as *Biblia moralizada de los Limbourg*, ed. Eberhard König and (Valencia: Patrimonio, 2010). BnF MS Fr. 166 was made for the Philip II the Bold (1342–1404) of Burgundy, and might have been orchestrated by Gerson. See John Lowden, “Beauty of Truth? Making a *Bible moralisée* in Paris around 1400,” *Patrons, Authors and Workshops*, ed. Godfried Croenen and Peter Ainsworth (Louvain: Peeters, 2006), 197–222; Millard Meiss, *The Limbourgs and their Contemporaries* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1974), 83.

23 BnF MS Fr. 166, fol. 28v (painted by two, Paul and Johan, of the Limbourg brothers, ca. 1400–04).

24 BnF MS Fr. 166, fol. 33r (painted by the Master of the Psalter of Jeanne de Laval, 1440s).

and Petrus Comestor (1100–78).<sup>25</sup> That text, in Latin verse, breaks plain-ken boundaries. It links details of the life of Jesus not only with the Old Testament, but also with contemporary knighthood:

Where in the creation of a knight a tap is usually given to the neck, but this knight, Christ, received not only one blow, but an almost infinite number of blows and smacks. His warhorse was an ass, which he mounted on Palm Sunday; the battlefield on which he fought was Mount Calvary; his spear was the lance of Longinus the soldier; a crown of very sharp thorns was his for a helmet; the sign or ornament of the helmet was the [INRI] title [above his head on the cross]... His squire was the most blessed Virgin Mary, who bore all his weapons with pious compassion.<sup>26</sup>

The *Speculum's* illustrations similarly defied plain-ken boundaries: each New Testament event is matched with three from the Old. One French manuscript links a vibrant image of the Jesus's Flagellation with three undersaturated Old Testament scenes: Achior bound by the Assyrians (Judith 6:9), wives tormenting Lamech (extra-canonical expansion of Genesis 4:23), and the suffering Job (Job 2).<sup>27</sup>

With its origins in thirteenth-century southern German lands, a third category, the *Biblia pauperum* [Bibles of the Poor], had even less text than either the *Speculum* or the moralized Bibles. It could be in Latin, or a vernacular, or in a combination of the two.<sup>28</sup> An example is BodL Arch. G c.14 (ca. 1470), printed as a forty-page blockbook.<sup>29</sup> Here one New Testament image is flanked by two

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- 25 *Speculum humanæ salvationis*, trans. Jean Mielot, ed. J. Lutz and P. Perdrizet, 2 vols. (Mulhouse: Meininger, 1907), I, 183, 352; Adrian Wilson and Joyce Lancaster Wilson, *A Medieval Mirror: Speculum humanae salvationis, 1324–1500* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985), 26–27. Joost Roger Robbe, *Der mittelniederländische Spiegel onser behoudnisse und seine lateinische Quelle* (Münster: Waxman, 2010), 93, points out that the usual German identification rests solely on the phrase “more Alemannico.”
- 26 Lutz and Perdrizet, ed., *Speculum*, I, 80–81 (lines 35–54).
- 27 University of Glasgow Library, MS Hunter 60 (T.2.18), fol. 29v, reproduced at *Glasgow University Library* (September 2000), <https://www.gla.ac.uk/myglasgow/library/files/special/exhibns/month/sep2000.html>
- 28 Heidelberg, Universitätsbibliothek, Cod. Pal. germ. 34, a late-fifteenth century blockbook from southwest Germany, has handwritten German translations on additional pages.
- 29 BodL MS Arch. G c.14. See Nigel F. Palmer, “Junius’s Blockbooks: Copies of the ‘Biblia pauperum’ and ‘Canticum canticorum’ in the Bodleian Library and their Place in the History of Printing,” *Renaissance Studies* 9 (1995): 137–65; Alan Coates, Kristian Jensen, Cristina Dondi, Bettina Wagner, and Helen Dixon, *A Catalogue of Books Printed in the Fifteenth Century Now in the Bodleian Library*, 6 vols. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005), I, 16–18.

Old Testament ones. They are integrated into an architectural setting, with a pair of prophets above, and another below, each holding a scroll inscribed with his words. The text is minimal, just captions plus “speech scrolls.” If the scrolls were bubbles, we would be looking at something like a modern comic strip. The images have mnemonic verses and commentary. This is very similar to a mid-fifteenth century scroll measuring 11 m, including thirty-eight sets of images, perhaps prepared for or gifted to Mehmed II (1432–81).<sup>30</sup> This typological arrangement proved influential across multiple media, including painting, sculpture, and stained glass.<sup>31</sup>

Such a visual technology appeared even outside of Bibles: a French manuscript from the 1490s illustrates the Latin *Sibyllae et prophetae de Christo Salvatore vaticinantes* [Sibyls and Prophets Prophecy about Christ the Saviour]. These sibyls were prophetesses in the ancient Near West. A dozen double-page sets of illustrations are featured, each showing a throned sibyl, taking up the entire left page, facing a horizontally split right page, with a scene from Jesus’s life above Old Testament prophets. Texts give details of the prophecies the set links to their fulfillment, and Bible citations are given textually and with an emblem of the appropriate gospel worked into the illustration.<sup>32</sup>

Something like plain-ken decoration might be found in the earthy annotations of some manuscripts. These speak to the particular circumstances and motivations of the humans involved in these exemplars’ production. One such annotation, in Armenian, pities its scribe’s hand as too cold to grip the pen. Some Biblical collections, in a variety of languages, contain curses threatening book thieves with the same fate as that which befell Judas.<sup>33</sup> A Coptic-Arabic gospel manuscript has a prayer, of unknown date, that meditates on the nature of copying: “O reader, in spiritual love forgive me, and pardon the daring of him who wrote, and turn his errors into some mystic good... There is no scribe who will not pass away, but what his hands have written will remain for ever. Write nothing with thy hand but that which thou wilt be pleased to see at the

30 Istanbul, Topkapı Palace Museum Library, Rotulus Seragliensis, Nr. 52. See Adolf Deissmann and Hans Wegener, ed., *Die Armenbibel des Serai: Rotulus Seragliensis Nr. 52* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1934).

31 Robert A. Koch, “The Sculptures of the Church of Saint-Maurice at Vienne, the *Biblia Pauperum* and the *Speculum Humanae Salvationis*,” *Art Bulletin* 32 (1950), 151–55; Emile Mâle, *L’Art religieux de la fin du moyen âge en France* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1949), 226–46; Wilson and Wilson, *Medieval Mirror*, 29–30, 134–41.

32 *Sibyllae et prophetae de Christo Salvatore vaticinantes*, BSB Cod. icon. 414. See Robin Raybould, *The Sibyl Series of the Fifteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 143–45, <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004332157>

33 Lawrence S. Thomson, “A Cursory Survey of Maledictions,” *Bulletin of the New York Public Library* 56 (1952): 59–60.

Resurrection.” The prayer concludes with a request that God “cause this holy copy to avail for the saving of the soul of the wretched man who wrote it.”<sup>34</sup>

## Language

### Qur’ans

Islam traditionally has approached the language of the Qur’an through the deep ken. The Qur’an is inherently Arabic, and so a translation of the Qur’an into another language is no longer a Qur’an. In another language, not only would the meanings not translate, it would lose its deep-ken power. Ibn Khaldun believed Arabic had a special ability to transmit both literal and figurative meaning.<sup>35</sup> Despite that special status of Arabic, al-Suyuti (1445–1505) held that the Qur’an incorporated all languages, thus signalling the multicultural and widespread applicability of its prophecy.<sup>36</sup>

As the House of Islam expanded, proportionately fewer Muslims were expert readers of Arabic, and translations became necessary. Both Muslim and Christian proselytism prompted approximations of the Qur’an in other languages. Muslims translated Qur’ans so that its nobility would convert outsiders to Islam, and Christians translated Qur’ans so that its errors, once identified, would convert Muslims to Christianity.

By 1400, the Qur’an had been translated into Latin, Persian, Greek, and Chagatai—the prestigious Turkish language of the Timurids. Perhaps it had also been translated into Sindhi and Berber, but no such translations are now known. Many of these were interlinear diglots, in which Arabic text alternated with, in a less prestigious script, the translated text.<sup>37</sup> For example, this (see Fig. 10.1) fourteenth-century Qur’an from the Persianate world has the Qur’anic text in

34 George Horner, *The Coptic Version of the New Testament in the Northern Dialect, Otherwise called Memphitic and Bohairic: With Introduction, Critical Apparatus, and Literal English Translation*, 4 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1898), I, cxlvi–cxlvii.

35 Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, trans. Franz Rosenthal, 3 vols. (New York: Pantheon, 1958), III, 344–46.

36 John Wansbrough, *Qur’anic Studies* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977), 218–19.

37 Baker, *Qur’an Manuscripts*, 76–78; Ismet Binark and Halit Eren, *World Bibliography of Translations of the Meanings of the Holy Qur’an: Printed Translations, 1515–1980*, ed. Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu (Istanbul: Research Centre for Islamic History, Art, and Culture, 1986); Blair, *Islamic Calligraphy*, 25–27; Maulana Ghulam Mustafa Qasmi, “Sindhi Translations and Tafsirs of the Holy Qur’an,” trans. Sayid Ghulam Mustafa Shah, *Sind Quarterly* 5 (1977): 33–49; Christian Wilhelm Troll and Syed Vahiduddin, *Islam in India: Studies and Commentaries* (New Delhi: Vikas, 1982); Jin Yijiu, “The Qur’an in China,” *Contributions to Asian Studies* 17 (1983): 95–101.



Arabic, in beautiful *muhaqqaq* arranged in seven lines—itsself a beautiful number in the deep ken. Underneath each line is a Persian translation in *naskh*, for even the deep ken did not require that a mere translation be visually impressive. Thus the original text was preserved, satisfying deep-ken requirements, while the translation made it meaningful to those illiterate in Arabic.



Fig. 10.1 Folio from a Qur'an Manuscript (fourteenth century), Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, public domain, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/454114>

An exception was the Latin Qur'an. Robert of Ketton's (fl. 1150s) (mis)translation, called *Lex Mahumet pseudoprophete* [The Law of Muhammad the False Prophet] (1143), proved far more popular in Europe than the later and better translation of Mark of Toledo (fl. 1193–1216). For Ketton, Islam was a "deadly" law (*lex letifera*). Ketton insisted he was getting at the sense, rather than the literal meaning, but mostly he paraphrased. At times, the Ketton translation went out of its way to create artificial space between the two subcults. For example, 2:87 refers to *ruh al-qudus*, the Christian Arabs' term for the Holy Spirit, but Ketton translated it as the *spiritus divinus* instead of *sanctus*, a spirit divine rather than holy.<sup>38</sup>

38 Blair, *Islamic Calligraphy*, 27–28; Thomas Burman, *Reading the Qur'an in Latin Christendom, 1140–1560* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 15–16, 27.

The Ketton translation was especially popular in a small convenient format. One early (ca. 1300) pocket edition included an index, presumably for quick access during debates. The thirteenth-century BnF MS Lat. 3668 (18 x 13 cm) lacked Ketton's commentary, and was itself repeatedly copied. A fifteenth-century copy was candid in its purpose, beginning with a poem attacking Islam and ending with a list of Qur'anic errors.<sup>39</sup>

In 1400, Spanish scholars had access to experts in Arabic and Islam. Acknowledging that it could have been much worse, Juan of Segovia (d. 1458) criticized the Ketton translation for ignoring the literal and explicit meaning while translating the implicit meaning as Ketton, or the Muslim commentaries he relied on, understood it. Segovia was aware of no other translation, and even Ketton's was obscure in his world. Therefore, he did a new translation. Segovia's translation, now lost, had three parallel columns, the original Arabic, a literal translation into Castillian, and a translation into a new hybrid Latin in which words that could be Arabicized in Castillian he Arabicized in Latin. His assistant Isa (another "Jesus") of Segovia helped with the Castillian translation. The preface, still extant, makes clear that Juan wanted a reliable Qur'an for debating Muslims.<sup>40</sup>

The earliest surviving multi-column translation of a Qur'anic text is that of the Jewish *converso* Flavius Mithridates (1480–81). This edition of surahs 21 and 22 has impressive parallel columns of Arabic and Latin, with notes, but without polemic. Both the translation and the notes are of poor quality, but the first owner, Federico da Montefeltro (1422–82), Duke of Urbino, probably just wanted to have a visually impressive book.<sup>41</sup>

Other editions followed. An unpopular polyglot Qur'an, again with Arabic and Latin, was commissioned in 1517. Segovia influenced the Franciscan Alonso de Espina's (ca. 1410–64) *Fortalitium fidei in uniuersos Christiane religionis hostes* [A Fortress of Belief against All the Enemies of the Christian Religion], which would itself influence Luther. By the early sixteenth century, there were many Qur'anic translations into Castillian, usually anonymous but by Muslims. However, Ketton's would remain the main translation well into the seventeenth century.<sup>42</sup>

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39 Burman, *Reading the Qur'an*, 91–94.

40 *Ibid.*, 31–37, 181–83.

41 Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Urb.lat.1384, fol. 65r–86r (ca. 1480–81).

42 Hartmut Bobzin, "Pre-1800 Preoccupations of Qur'anic Studies," in *Encyclopedia of the Qur'an*, ed. McAuliffe, IV, 243; Burman, *Reading the Qur'an*, 15, 49; Ziad Elmarsafy, *The Enlightenment Qur'an* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009), 1–36.

## Bibles

When our period begins, the New Testament had been translated into many languages. The genealogy of those translations is rather hypothetical in some details. The original Greek had been translated directly into Armenian (a famously expert and beautiful translation), Gothic, Coptic, Latin, Ethiopic, Syriac, Arabic, and Old Church Slavonic. Four of these translations begat their own trans-translations: Syriac into Persian and Sogdian, Coptic probably influenced the Nubian, and Arabic (itself in turn influenced by Syriac and Coptic) influenced the Ethiopic. Latin translations served as a basis for trans-translations into Anglo-Saxon (Old English), French, German, Catalan, Castilian Spanish, Franco-Provençal, Polish, Italian, Bohemian, Norwegian, and Dutch (the Rhinelandic Rhyming Bible). The Georgian translation's ancestry is largely unknown. Other parts of the Bible, but apparently not the gospels, existed in Aramaic and Icelandic. By 1400, every part of the Bible existed in Czech, but typically different passages were translated by different authors. Frequent war and frequent usage mean that most Bibles from this period are no longer extant.<sup>43</sup>

These vernaculars were done by monks for monks or aristocratic patrons, not for a broad and vulnerable public audience. There is today a false idea that it was widely illegal to translate the Bible into vernacular language, and that this prohibition was so effective that no Bible was translated into the vernacular. Neither of these were true. As we have seen, the Bible had been translated into a dozen vernaculars by 1400. Authorities did not oppose the vernacular per se, but they were pragmatists who understood the difficulties of unsupervised translation and the dangers of it being interpreted outside of tradition. Therefore, occasional prohibitions were issued against allowing the vernacular to get into the hands of vulnerable populations lacking the training to read the Bible correctly. Some believed, with the deep ken, that high status was important for reading, as the high status of the reader must consonate with the high status of the text; skilful means were needed to relay truth to the masses safely.

Thus, for example, Charles IV (1316–78) had outlawed the German translations made by mystics for women and the lay Friends of God movement. His daughter, Anne of Bohemia (1366–94) read the gospels in Czech and German, in addition to Latin, and brought them with her to England in 1381.

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43 Peter Brock, *The Political and Social Doctrines of the Unity of Czech Brethren in the Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth Centuries* (The Hague: Mouton and Co., 1957), 31; Wim François, "Vernacular Bible Reading in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe: The 'Catholic' Position Revisited," *The Catholic Historical Review* 104 (2018): 23–56, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/cat.2018.0001>; Ketevan Gadilla, "Filling Some Gaps: Notes on the History of Georgian Bible Translation," *The Bible Translator* 62 (2011): 46–54, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/026009351106200106>

Charles's university had been open to Wycliffite ideas. Thomas Arundel (1353–1414), the Archbishop of Canterbury, allegedly remarked at Anne's funeral that she encouraged English translations "with the doctors' glosses upon them."<sup>44</sup> Wycliffe defended his own desire for a vernacular Bible by mentioning that Anne had brought her German-Czech-Latin polyglot Bible to England.<sup>45</sup>

In other contexts, the vernacular could even be a form of humility. The 1454 *Giardino de oratione fructuoso* [Garden of Fruitful Prayer], ascribed to Nicholas of Osimo but probably written by an unknown canon regular in Venice, reflects that the kingdom of Heaven may in fact be "for" the poor and unlearned, and so is written in the vernacular. "Scientific vanity [...] makes the soul proud," and the author chose the vernacular to achieve something more "useful" than to "satisfy the vanity and curiosity of those who seek to have ornate speech that is Rhetorical and exquisite."<sup>46</sup>

The Waldensian Poor represented something new, a subcult that had learned the scriptures so well in their own language that they could impressively rely on them to defend themselves against ecclesiastical prosecution, although their well-grounded arguments were no refuge from violence. Attempts to make the scripture available to a wide audience in the vernacular relied in part on an old idea that the Holy Spirit would guarantee that even uneducated Christians would not go too astray in their readings.<sup>47</sup>

Similarly, for Wycliffe and the Wycliffites, liturgical bits of scripture did not suffice; Christians need to know the Bible as a whole. Sermons should abandon entertaining non-Biblical stories, characteristic of mendicant preachers' sermons, and instead rely on scripture. The Wycliffites used the Bible itself, and especially Jesus, to justify this need to propagate the Bible. God had ordered Moses to make the people know the Law. The Prologue to the Wycliffite Bible noted that Jesus "says that the gospel shall be preached in all the world."<sup>48</sup> Wycliffe's *Mirror*

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- 44 G. R. Evans, *Language and Logic of the Bible: The Road to Reformation* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1985), 83–84, <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511555237>; Nikki R. Keddie, "Symbol and Sincerity in Islam," *Studia Islamica* 19 (1963): 27–63; Henry Hargreaves, "The Wycliffite Versions," in *Cambridge History of the Bible*, ed. G. W. H. Lampe, 3 vols. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1969), II, 392; Richard Marsden, "The Bible in English," in *The New Cambridge History of the Bible, Volume 2: From 600 to 1450*, ed. Richard Marsden and E. Ann Matter (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2012), 217–38, <https://doi.org/10.1017/cho19780521860062.014>
- 45 John Wycliffe, "De Triplici Vinculo Amoris," in *Polemical Works in Latin*, ed. Rudolf Buddensieg, 2 vols. (London: Trübner, 1883), I, 168 (ch. 2).
- 46 Nicholas of Osimo, *Giardino de oratione fructuoso* (Venice: Simone Bevilacqua, 1496), 8–9.
- 47 Evans, *Language and Logic*, 33, 82.
- 48 "Notes to the Prologue to Wycliffite Bible. Chapter 15," in *Selections from English Wycliffite Writings*, ed. Anne Hudson (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1978), 67.

of *Secular Lords* argued for the vernacular on the grounds that Jesus himself did not teach in Greek or Latin.<sup>49</sup> One Wycliffite commentary on the paternoster noted that Jesus taught his disciples this prayer neither in French nor in Latin, but in the language they actually spoke. For “the truth of God standeth not in one language more than another, but whoever liveth best, teacheth best, pleaseth most God, of what language ever he be.”<sup>50</sup> Wycliffites would refer to their translations of the New Testament as “Christ’s law.”<sup>51</sup>

The Wycliffite philosophy of language located knowledge not in the words themselves but in what they meant underneath. Their tracts note that “wit stands not in language but in grounding of truth,” regardless of language.<sup>52</sup> The particular words were incidental: truth was truth regardless of language—or indeed whether we spell it “treuthe,” “troughe,” or “trwothe.” This promotion of meaning over words removed any obligation on the translator to preserve the syntax of the Latin, and Wycliffite vernacular translations sought to preserve instead the meaning. The ultimate goal, as the Prologue explains, was “to make the sentence as true and open in English as it is in Latin,” or even “more true and more open than it is Latin.”<sup>53</sup> English thus had the potential to be superior to the Latin. For Wycliffites, scripture was equally good in any language.<sup>54</sup>

In the 1390s, a translation team began a new vernacular translation. Wycliffe started and probably played some managerial role in the translation. Nicholas of Hereford (d. 1420) (see Chapter 21) was involved with the Old Testament if not the New. The team gathered various copies of the text, and worked with commentary to make and then correct a translation. Unlike earlier vernacular translations, this team did not rely on commentary to interpret scripture, but only to build up a reliable Latin source text. At first the translation lingered close to the Latin, sometimes too literal to be understood, but in time the translators became more vernacular in their vernacular. With a plain-ken motivation, they sought to preserve and transmit the meaning, rather than the words, to a wide audience.<sup>55</sup>

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49 “Speculum secularium dominorum,” in John Wycliffe, *Opera minora*, ed. Johann Loserth and F. D. Matthew (London: Wyclif Society, 1913), 75.

50 John Wycliffe, “De Pater Noster,” in *Select English Works*, ed. Thomas Arnold, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1869), III, 98–99.

51 Hargreaves, “The Wycliffite Versions,” 392; Anthony Kenny, *Wycliffe* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1987), 64; Evans, *Language and Logic*, 83, 154.

52 “Tractatus de Regibus,” in *Four English Political Tracts of the Later Middle Ages*, ed. Jean-Philippe Genet (London: Royal Historical Society, 1977), 5.

53 Hudson, ed., “Notes,” 68.

54 Rita Copeland, *Pedagogy, Intellectuals, and Dissent in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2001), 99–140.

55 Mary Dove, *The First English Bible: The Text and Context of the Wycliffite Versions* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2007), 81; Hargreaves, “The Wycliffite Versions,”

Over two hundred Wycliffite Bibles survive. Wycliffites tended to prefer to translate the gospels; over two thirds of surviving Bibles contain only New Testament material, and they also translated Clement of Llanthony's twelfth-century gospel harmony *Unum ex Quattuor* [One from Four]. Vernacular Bibles had a diversity of grammar and spelling: Jesus advised gouging out an eye that caused sin, and that eye could be "ei3e, e3e, i3e, y3e, eigne, eigh, eghe, egh, ehe, ei, ee." Many vernacular Bibles had highlighted capital letters at the beginning of chapters, with any parenthetical words underlined in red. The gospels often had lectionaries, for use in church service on the major festival days, and were punctuated for reading in church. They tended to be well made.<sup>56</sup>

A prologue to the Wycliffite Bible explicitly historicized the translation process: we are making a vernacular just as Jerome (d. 420) once did in writing the Vulgate, for Latin was the vernacular language of the Roman Empire. Jerome, placed in time, "was not so holy as the apostles and evangelists whose books he translated into Latin." What to us is a too reverentially handled text was originally produced as a simple vernacular translation. Careful scholarship backed up this new translation, and the prologue asserted that it was likely less corrupt than the Vulgate: the translators understood the Latin Bible, because it was a historical product, to be filled with errors that had crept into the text over the centuries. The prologue asks that God allow an English translation for the English people, just as there was once a Latin translation for the benefit of the Roman people.<sup>57</sup> Such thinking was echoed in Prague, where Jan Hus (ca. 1370–1415) justified vernacular translation by appealing to the historical multiplicity of gospel languages: only Mark's Gospel, he wrote, was originally in Latin, as Matthew's had been in Hebrew, Luke's in Syriac, and John's in Greek.<sup>58</sup>

No such defences stopped contemporaries from attacking Wycliffites for being too focused on the literal meaning. In 1389, the Bishop of Hereford complained that they interpret canon "literally, in the modern way, rather than as the Holy Spirit demands." The words in these interpretations "wander from their proper meanings and seem to be guessed new," for the Wycliffites judge words not "from the sense they do make but by the sense from which they are

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399–400, 405; Anne Hudson, *The Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), 239; Kenny, *Wycliffe*, 65–66; Marsden, "The Bible in English," 230; Hudson, ed., "Notes," 67–68.

56 Dove, *First English Bible*, 17–18; Hargreaves, "The Wycliffite Versions," 394, 409; Hudson, *Premature*, 198, 203, 232.

57 Hudson, ed., "Notes," 69–71.

58 Jan Hus, *The Letters of Jan Hus*, trans. Matthew Spinka (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1972), 62.

made..."<sup>59</sup> In 1407, Oxford saw debates on vernacular translations of the Bible. Did English have sufficient vocabulary, morphology, and rhetoric to preserve meaning from the Latin? Would people not literate in Latin falsely assume that because they understood the English words they could understand the true, from the deep ken, meaning—and then preach it? Could the Latin language survive this ceding of authority to English? In 1409, Arundel announced a condemnation threatening with death those who translate scripture into English or any other language. Another critic used a Jesus quotation (Mt 7:6) to complain that through this translation “the pearl of the Gospel is scattered abroad and trodden underfoot by swine.” Similarly, Lincoln College, Oxford, founded in 1427, intended “to defend the mysteries of Scripture against those ignorant laics who profaned with swinish snouts its most holy pearls.” Responding to Hussites and Wycliffites, Jean Gerson (1363–1429) at Constance proposed a vernacular-Bible ban, citing the dangerous precedent of the Waldensian Poor.<sup>60</sup>

The fifteenth century saw vernacular Bibles made in a variety of Romance and Germanic languages, including Danish. Controversy followed many of these translations, sometimes into the books themselves. The Archbishop of Mainz issued a “Censor’s Edict” (1486) against vernacular Bibles. The Delft Bible included a defence of the vernacular in its preface. The Cologne Bible, as a precaution, omitted the identify of its publisher. French vernaculars were not condemned, but they were so handsomely produced that only the wealthy could afford them; the lack of widespread appeal made them safe. Murdoch Nisbet (d. 1559) translated the New Testament into Scots, but it was never published because of fear of ecclesiastical wrath.<sup>61</sup>

In Spain, until the Reformation, the authorities’ interest in scripture focused on the dangers of Jews and crypto-Jews misusing it (see Chapter 6). Jewish translations of the Old Testament in Spanish tend to use language that downplayed any suggestions of a high Christology. Probably this was partly intentional and partly a reflection of how much the Vulgate went out of its way to emphasize Christological possibilities. The translation from Latin

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59 John Trevenant, *Registrum Johannis Trefnant, episcopi herefordensis, A.D. 1389–1404*, ed. William W. Capes (Hereford: Wilson and Phillips, 1914), 232.

60 Jean Gerson, “De necessaria communione laicorum sub utraque specie,” in OC, X, 58. See Andrew Clark, “Lincoln College,” in *The Colleges of Oxford: Their History and Traditions*, ed. Andrew Clark (London: Methuen, 1892), 172; Hargreaves, “The Wycliffite Versions,” 387–88; Hudson, *Premature*, 271; Marsden, “The Bible in English.”

61 Hargreaves, “The Wycliffite Versions,” 414; W. B. Lockwood, “Vernacular Scriptures in Germany and the Low Countries Before 1500,” in *Cambridge History of the Bible*, ed. Lampe, II, 428–34 (434); C. A. Robson, “Vernacular Scriptures in France,” in *Cambridge History of the Bible*, ed. Lampe, II, 436–52 (451).

sometimes required explanation: one Spanish version of Matthew expanded *Posseyran la terra* [inherit the earth] to clarify, *lo es, la terra dels vivents* [that is, the land of the living].<sup>62</sup>

## Two Revolutions

Manuscript production had seen relatively little improvement in efficiency in recent centuries. In the early Middle Ages, the book-like codex replaced the scroll, and around the year 1000 the “lower-case” miniscule replaced the “all-capitals” uncial. Each replacement allowed manuscripts to be copied more quickly, and more economically. Since then, only cursive and paper had improved efficiency. In 1400, manuscript production was starting to recover from a half-century-long collapse triggered by plague and economic depression. By the 1420s, production had recovered earlier heights, and, in the 1470s, it peaked, with a shift of production from France, the old centre, to the German- and Italian- speaking lands.

Most of these gains were of recently authored works. The high quality of parchment and early paper meant manuscripts had long lives, and traditional works including the Bible had already saturated the market and declined in production. France saw some eighteen times more Bibles being copied in the thirteenth century than in the fifteenth. The Sorbonne’s library had forty Bibles in 1338, but only thirty a century later—and they would have been glad to sell you one to raise money for building repairs. This lull in Bible production was partially offset by spikes in demand for Qur’ans, which were used more frequently. Thus, in Istanbul soon after the conquest the demand was so great that Qur’an-manufacture teams could not kill quickly enough to create leather for the bindings, and so used textiles, including a bloodless velvet.<sup>63</sup>

Given the slump in demand for Bibles and the erratic demand for Qur’ans, no one expected a revolution, especially given the deep-ken preference for beautifully crafted canon. In fact, they got two revolutions: miniaturization in the Near West and automation in the Far West.

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62 Margherita Morreale, “Vernacular Scriptures in Spain,” in *Cambridge History of the Bible*, ed. Lampe, II, 465–91 (474–85).

63 Blair, *Islamic Calligraphy*, 377–78; Bozzolo and Ornato, *Pour une histoire*, 93–95, 116–18; Evans, *Language and Logic*, 156; Hobbins, *Authorship and Publicity*, 9, 25, 143.



### Miniaturization: The *Naskh* Revolution

Timur’s grandson Ibrahim Sultan (1394–1435) was the governor of Shiraz, a masterful calligrapher who wrote at least five Qur’ans himself, and a generous patron of calligraphy. Ibrahim removed the Qur’an from the domain of *muhaqqaq*, the “perfect” script: *naskh*, the generic, functional (“transcriptional”) script used for all writings could also be used for an entire Qur’an. In 1427, he created a small two-volume Qur’an in a distinctive *naskh*. It was beautiful yet compact: final letters stacked themselves up into towers, and final tails stretched out elegantly, but efficiently, underneath the following word. The inspiration could have been the *ghubar* script of the amulet miniature Qur’ans. *Naskh* was an effective script, but still could hold deep-ken power. Indeed, Ibrahim’s two Qur’anic volumes were kept as an amulet above the “Qur’anic” Gate of Shiraz, to bless travellers passing through it.<sup>64</sup>

Shirazi scribes passing through this gate took the style to India and Anatolia, and maybe as far as China.<sup>65</sup> This began a revolution of miniaturization—not the extreme miniaturization of the tiny amulet Qur’ans, but a practical miniaturization that allowed for Qur’ans to be more efficiently produced. The average size of Qur’ans in our survey of some 200 exemplars from the 1380–1520s period is about 1,200 cm<sup>2</sup> (about the size of two adjacent 8.5 in x 11 in pages), with a height-to-width aspect ratio of about 4:1 (about that of a single 8.5 in x 11 in page). This average page size halves in the period spanning 1520–1670s, and halves again between 1670–1820. The average number of lines jumps by over a third between the first two periods. The Qur’anic dominance of *naskh* climbs steadily, as the presence of *muhaqqaq* declines precipitously before essentially disappearing. These three trends—tighter script, denser lines, and a smaller page—all conspired to create a Qur’an that was smaller, more portable, and more efficiently made.

|                                      | 1400–1520s             | 1520s–1670s           | 1670s–1820             |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| <b>size of page (cm<sup>2</sup>)</b> | 1,200                  | 610 (≈8.5 in x 11 in) | 310                    |
| <b>height to width ratio</b>         | 1.38 (≈8.5 in x 11 in) | 1.54                  | 1.66 (getting squarer) |
| <b>lines per page</b>                | 11                     | 15                    | 15                     |
| <b>% <i>naskh</i><sup>66</sup></b>   | 58%                    | 67%                   | 89%                    |
| <b>% <i>muhaqqaq</i></b>             | 18%                    | 4%                    | <1%                    |

Table 10.1 Changes in Qur’an Measurements.

64 Blair, *Islamic Calligraphy*, 263–65; Lentz and Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision*, 332–33.

65 Blair, *Islamic Calligraphy*, 352.

66 This is complicated because of the use of multiple scripts.

## Automation: The Print Reformation

Europe went in a different direction, more recklessly abandoning beauty to achieve a greater economy. That revolution, too, began with amuletic power.

Aachen was an attractive destination for pilgrims, for its cathedral preserved Jesus's swaddling clothes and the loincloth he wore on the cross. Huge crowds overran the city when the relics were on display. Smart pilgrims sought to carry the spiritual benefits back for use at home. The best tool for this was a mirror, which could capture spiritual rays off the relics, and then at the pilgrim's home release them for application on an ailing relative or cow. One medical treatise, citing Aristotle (384–322 BC), noted that a menstruating woman's glance could "infect" a mirror, making *nuues sanguinolentas* [bloody clouds] appear.<sup>67</sup> One such mirror was 10 x 6 cm, of a lead-tin alloy, with low-relief images of the Madonna with Child and the Crucifixion. The huge number of pilgrims for the display years meant that the local goldsmiths could not meet demand.<sup>68</sup>

In 1438, Hans Riffe and Johannes Gensfleisch saw in this a business opportunity, and joined forces to mass produce 32,000 convex pilgrim mirrors for 1439. Unfortunately, the pilgrims never showed up. Riffe and Gensfleisch had forgotten to check that it was a display year for the relics, and their mirrors would have to sit a year unsold in storage. Gensfleisch took a new last name based on his family's home, Gutenberg, and adapted mirror-production technology into the printing press.<sup>69</sup>

Gutenberg's invention solved a problem for Nicholas of Cusa (1401–64). Cusa sought to standardize the mass and its manual, the missal. The two had opportunities to meet in Mainz and in Strasbourg. Gutenberg helped develop four sizes of the *textura* typeface, exactly those necessary to print a missal. The earliest owners of Gutenberg's Bibles were abbots supporting Cusa's reforms. A 1470 Vulgate included a preface by Giovanni Andrea Bussi (1417–75) to the pope; it remembered that Cusa described printing as "that which the soul, rich in honours and meriting heaven, of Nicholas of Cues [...] so fervently desired." It is hard to imagine Cusa and Gutenberg not working in tandem.<sup>70</sup>

67 Johannes de Ketham, *Compendio de la humana salud*, ed. María Teresa Herrera (Madrid: Arco Libros, 1990), 135. This is the 1494 Spanish translation of the original 1491 Latin publication. Aristotle, *On Sleep and Dreams*, trans. David Gallop (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1996), 93 (459b29–460a23).

68 Kurt Köster, *Gutenberg im Strassburg* (Mainz: Gutenberg Gesellschaft, 1973), 37, 57.

69 *Ibid.*, 64, 71–73, 84–86.

70 Rudolf Blum, *Der Prozess Fust gegen Gutenberg* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1954), 98; Adolph Franz, *Die Messe im deutschen Mittelalter* (Freiburg: Herdersche Verlagshandlung, 1902), 308; Albert Kapr, "Gab es Beziehungen zwischen Johannes Gutenberg und Nikolaus von Kues?," *Gutenberg-Jahrbuch* 47 (1972): 32–40; Eberhard König, "Möglichkeiten kunstgeschichtlicher Beiträge zur Gutenberg-Forschung: Die 42-zeilige Bibel in Cologny, Heinrich Molitor und der

Cusa had ties to Cardinal Bessarion (1403–72), whose ears may have received word about advances in Korean printing. Gutenberg probably got the idea for metal type from Asia, via Cusa, and the idea for the press from wine presses—Mainz was at the confluence of the Mainz and Rhine, both of which have wine-production-rich valleys. He brought his own managerial ingenuity to the table.<sup>71</sup>

Gutenberg did not rush to print the Bible, given its market saturation. His first printed book appears to have been a Latin grammar. Another early publication (ca. 1452–53) was a prophecy foretelling the recapture of the Holy Sepulchre before Jesus's Second Coming. Some early publications could be wildly popular. One indulgence letter had a print run of some 142,950 exemplars.<sup>72</sup>

Only in 1454 had Gutenberg completed the Bible that became known as the B42. Gutenberg's printed Bibles approximated the dimensions of an expensive manuscript Bible (e.g., 42 x 32 cm). Some of his dimensions were dictated, with the deep ken, by the golden ratio. His Bible, unlike the manuscripts of copyists, had lines of uniform length. The B42s had a print run of perhaps 180, made over two years. Each had almost 1,300 pages. Almost three dozen were on calf-skin vellum, requiring a slaughter of some five thousand calves, but the rest were on Italian paper. Once printed, they still required another half year for colouring, illuminating, and binding.<sup>73</sup>

The first printed books used black-letter scripts. *Textualis* was used in 42-line Gutenberg Bibles to imitate handwriting. By the 1460s, the Roman scripts were used in print. Arnold Pannartz and Conrad Sweynheym published the first Roman-script book, the same Latin grammar Gutenberg had printed, in 1464 at Subiaco. In Europe in the 1470s, pressure from the printing press made manuscript production decline.<sup>74</sup>

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Einfluß der Klosterreform um 1450," *Gutenberg-Jahrbuch* (1984): 101–02; Köster, *Gutenberg im Strassburg*, 64, 153–54.

71 Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2005), 220, <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511819230>

72 Jonathan Green, *Printing and Prophecy: Prognostication and Media Change, 1450–1550* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press 2011), 15–38, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1qv5n84>; Kapr, "Gab," 189; Oskar Schade, *Geistliche Gedichte des XIV. und XV. Jahrhunderts vom Niederrhein* (Hannover: Rümpler, 1854): 292–332;

Frieder Schanze, "Wieder einmal das 'Fragment vom Weltgericht'-Bermerkungen und Materialien zur 'Sybillenweissagung,'" *Gutenberg-Jahrbuch* 75 (2000): 42–63; Kai-Michael Sprenger, "'Volumus tamen, quod expressio fiat ante finem mensis Mai presentis': Sollte Gutenberg 1452 im Auftrag Nicolaus von Kues' Ablaßbriefe drucken," *Gutenberg-Jahrbuch* 74 (1999): 42–57.

73 Köster, *Gutenberg im Strassburg*, 165–71; Raúl Mario Rosarivo, "Der goldene Modul der 36-zeiligen Bibel. Die Entdeckung eines Werkstattgeheimnisses Johann Gutenbergs," *Gutenberg-Jahrbuch* 30 (1955): 70–74.

74 Hobbins, *Authorship and Publicity*, 9; Neddermeyer, *Von der Handschrift*, 222, 288–97, 657. "Drucker mit dem bizarren R (Adolf Rusch) (Straßburg, Offizin 2),"

Muslims long refused to print the Qur'an, as a sacred text should be copied with maximum care and beauty, thus by hand. The intentions of the manufacturers were, with the deep ken, important components in the Qur'an's quality, worth, truth, and power. The first printed Qur'an (1537–38) was thus made by Christians, a volume full of errors, some possibly intentional. The first printed Arabic work was also by Christians—not a Bible, but, unsurprisingly, a Book of Hours, the *Kitab Salat al-Sawa'i* (1514), supported by Pope Julius II (1443–1513), for non-Catholic Christian Arabs.<sup>75</sup> It concluded with a colophon invitation that implied a simile between the reader's life and a textual tradition: "Let him who finds an error rectify it and God will rectify his matters through the Lord."<sup>76</sup> Allegedly there were bans in 1483 and 1515 against printing Arabic in Ottoman territory, on penalty of death, but I know of no source from this before André Thevet (1516–90), separated from the events by 2,000 km, three generations, and a relaxed attitude towards truth.<sup>77</sup> In the 1490s, Jews were printing in Hebrew in the Ottoman Empire. Perhaps too few people evinced enough interest in printing Qur'ans to trigger its prohibition.

## Envoi

Gutenberg's automation revolution maintained textual meaning (and would eventually even find ways to strengthen textual authorities) at the cost of the meaning of the object. Sometimes when I electronically submit a review of a manuscript to a journal, an automatic message of thanks from the editor bounces back. This is an efficient system, that transmits a superficial message at high speed, but some depth of meaning is lacking. In the fifteenth century, automating the creation of canon might have felt like automating the creation of gratitude, efficient but somehow hollow. The Christians did not, for example, automate the consecration of the Eucharist, although as we have seen they did use presses to produce the pre-consecrated hosts. The printing press was dangerous also in that it could spread ideas so quickly, for good or ill.

Just as Gutenberg removed the Bible from manual production, Ibrahim Sultan removed the Qur'an from the Perfect script. The declining size of

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*Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin*, <http://tw.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/of0655>. The idea that Rusch published a Roman book almost simultaneously seems to misread 1474 as 1464.

75 Miroslav Krek, "The Enigma of the First Arabic Book Printed from Movable Type," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 38 (1979): 203–12.

76 *Kitāb ṣalāt al-sawā'i* (Fano: Gregorius de Gregoriis de Forli, 1514). Translation from Krek, "Enigma," 208.

77 André Thevet, *Histoire des plus illustres et savans hommes de leurs siècles*, 8 vols. (Paris: Mauger, 1670), VII, 111.

Qur'ans is also a way of responding to the pressures solved by the printing press, while avoiding the ugly outrage of that printing press. From a strictly plain-ken perspective, which did not balk at the cold-hearted creative power of a machine, the printing press was superior. The genius of miniaturization lay in its balancing economic efficiency with a deeper understanding of value.

# IDEAS



## II. Interpreting Canon

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Reading and understanding are not synonyms. How does a Jesus cultist understand scripture? Interpretation clarifies meaning, makes it relevant, and makes it consistent. This is no small feat. Jesus and Muhammad both were interpreters of earlier texts, and Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406) wrote explicitly of the importance, even the necessity, of interpretation.<sup>1</sup> Interpreters understood difficult passages—such as the bad behaviour of Old Testament figures, or the depravities of its *Song of Songs*—as allegories, or as cautionary tales illustrating how not to behave. Interpretation was rarely an individual attempt to create an individual reading; traditional interpreters sought not their own originality, but the recovery of the original intended meaning.

Despite the Franciscan development of the plain ken, in 1400 the deep ken was still dominant, especially in the Far West (see Appendix B). Christians had a plain-ken awareness that errors could creep into the manuscript tradition, but this awareness did not distract them from their deep ken. In contrast, Muslims already had a plain-ken revolution, peaking around the tenth century, and, by 1400, they were influenced by the plain ken (although still mostly informed by the deep). Why this difference between the groups? Perhaps the Christian canon was more obviously a collection of texts, which made inconsistencies less disturbing, while issues in Qur'ans were more glaring for the Muslims, thus inspiring them towards the plain ken. Perhaps the Far West's greater distance from the Asian Core's scholarship kept the Christians intellectually isolated.

In the fifteenth century, however, both Muslims and Christians become more interested in aspects of the plain ken: historical context, psycho-historicizing copyists and editors, and analyzing collected manuscripts to recover uncorrupted meaning. The first half of this chapter begins with an explanation of each ken's approach to canon. It then presents a history of canon interpretation before our period, highlighting Muslim inclination towards the plain ken and Christian inclination towards the deep. The second half focuses on the fifteenth century,

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1 Muhsin Mahdi, *Ibn Khaldun's Philosophy of History* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 55–56, 72, 163, 242.



as Muslim exegetes continued to balance both kens while some Christians took up the plain ken more seriously.

## Theory of Interpretation

### Deep-ken Interpretations

One can approach a text with a deep or a plain ken. We can describe a tradition's authoritative texts as "canon," and in practice the term implies a deep-ken attitude towards those texts. A text viewed as canon typically has four characteristics. Canon is profound: every passage of it has great meaning. Canon is wide: any question finds its answer in it. Canon is moral: its teachings are consonant with traditional morality and decorum. Canon is consistent: it is homogenous both in form (Genesis is of the same stuff as Revelations), and in content (one part cannot contradict another). This is a generalization, and rules will hold more or less true for different examples of canon. The insistence on consistency, for example, was stronger among Christians than among Confucianists, who considered Confucius merely an editor of his classics.

Unless you happen to have a deep-ken attitude towards a canon, these may be difficult to appreciate. Investigating the logic of canon and its four characteristics can help us understand why people would turn to bibliomancy, using scripture—perhaps by turning to a random page—to divine the future: comprehensive, canon must answer your divination question.

Canon sometimes defies the expectations of these four characteristics, but different traditions have developed deep-ken ways of resolving these challenges. One strategy is sometimes called "spiritual reading," to approach the text with the proper attitude. The Qur'an (3:7), for example, warns against the interpretations of readers whose hearts harbour deviation and perversity. Of course, spiritual reading is merely a "solution" only from our plain-ken perspective. This would be like saying a book in Spanish is hard to understand, and the "solution" is to read it as if it were Spanish. For a modern parallel, ask a stand-up comic about the importance of an audience's attitude for their ability to understand his humour. Buddhists could understand a passage of canon as adopting a non-absolute truth for pedagogical purposes (*upāyakosalla*), with a similar concept *quan* 權 in the Confucian tradition. Later Confucianists would reconcile contradictions by attributing subtle modal distinctions to the contradictory passages: they are not talking about precisely the same thing.<sup>2</sup>

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2 See Jinfen Yan, "Between the Good and the Right: The Middle Way in Neo-Confucian and Mahāyāna Moral Philosophy," in *Confucian Ethics in Retrospect*

*Example: Zechariah 9:9*

The easiest way to see precisely how deep-ken interpretation works is to consider an example. Let's use the deep ken to read this line, from Zechariah 9:9: "ecce rex tuus veniet tibi iustus et salvator ipse pauper et ascendens super asinum."

A pro-Latin deep-ken view might understand that this line's meaning would change, for the worse, if (1) it were in English ("Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey"), (2) it were written in an ugly script ("*ecce rex...*"), (3) you were not a Christian, or (4) you read it on your phone while sitting on the toilet. The meaning is hyper-contextualized (embedded, decentralized, dispersed): it is informed by (1) the language, (2) the appearance, (3) a tradition of interpretation, and (4) the attitude of the reader. The beauty of the context (written in a beautiful script, in a beautiful language, in a beautiful manuscript) reflects, and even participates in, the truth of the text.

Such an insistence on the priority of language implies that it was not an accident that the word "rex" came to be used to refer to a king. It was not the case that people invented a word to describe that man with a crown. *Rex* existed before the first king (see Chapter 17). This verse has deep meaning. We can find in it subtle references to Christian doctrine and to life today. For example, the word *rex* has three letters, which reflects the Christian Trinity. Translating *rex* into the English "king" loses this, as "king" has four letters. Hyper-contextualization thus facilitates deep meaning: language matters. Furthermore, its atemporal nature also facilitates deep meaning, as it allows you to apply it to your life right now by emulating the humility of the king riding a donkey. In the deep ken, this *rex* is *literally* a reference to Jesus. That Jesus lived some half millennium *after* Zechariah is irrelevant. Even though the plain ken's Zechariah had no knowledge of Jesus and no intention of writing about him, for the deep ken the verse has a literal reference to Jesus. The verse can have deep meaning beyond the intentions of its human author, which are largely irrelevant.

The truth of this verse exists outside time; it is atemporal. For the deep ken, truth is eternal and history matters little: every moment in time in history is equidistant from Truth. In some technical sense it may have been written by a prophet Zechariah during the reign of Darius the Great (522–486 BC), but this has little relationship to its meaning. It was, is, and will be true at all times, and for your purposes its most relevant time is *right now* as you are reading it. If you were using your grandmother's recipe to make tortillas, the time of day

when she wrote down the recipe, or the pen she used, would have no significant implication on how you prepared them today. The context of its being written down is not relevant.

### Plain-ken Interpretations

Plain-ken interpretation is more familiar. Because the concentrated meaning is the important part, not the other contexts, we can make it widely available. It has no intrinsic meaning, so we can remove it from its contexts for wider dissemination. Indeed, those contexts are themselves temporal and subject to change—language changes, handwriting scripts change. The plain ken can still find meaning, or learn what the original author intended the meaning to be, but just not discover it already existing within the text. As we have seen in the previous chapter, a plain-ken approach takes the text to be an abstraction, independent of the written page.<sup>3</sup> We can translate a verse into a different language without serious repercussions. You can read it while in the bathroom—maybe that’s a better use of your time than scrolling through social media. A Christian and a Hindu can understand a Bible verse equally well, if they understand English equally well...

... and if they understand the historical context equally well. Who was Zechariah? Who was his audience? What genre was he writing in? Was he intending to make a timeless pronouncement, or was he speaking specifically to a contemporary audience about those particular circumstances? In the latter case, we would err in taking his verse as literally applying to our own lives. Thus, the historical context of a verse affects its meaning. We need to understand the historical circumstances and even the psychology of the human author.

Subject to history, plain-ken meaning is fragile and malleable. Just as the circumstances and psychology of the human author is important, so too must we psycho-historicize the many copyists and editors who link the original manuscript, long lost, with the copy of the copy of the copy... of the copy that you are reading now. Copyists and editors, whether accidentally or intentionally, introduce mistakes into manuscript traditions. Instead of searching for deep meaning in a verse, the plain ken values collecting as many manuscripts as possible, and then using them to methodically calculate the original meaning—original to the human author, not to God. Philologically reading the text reveals its history, and understanding its history reveals its philological meaning.

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3 Martin Irvine, *The Making of Textual Culture: 'Grammatica' and Literary Theory, 350–1100* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1994), 17.

The plain ken has a powerful sense that time deteriorates meaning. Such a view might allow for contradictions in canon by appealing to the fact that it had been written collectively, over a long period of time, well before anyone considered it canon. The chain of authorities that guarantees meaning may have gone wrong at some point, and so we must “jump the chain,” by going back to an earlier, more reliable point.

### Comparing the Two Perspectives

This table summarizes the proceeding discussion and organizes the possible divergences between deep and plain kens into three moments: creating, transmitting, and receiving text.

|                  | CREATION OF TEXT                           | TRANSMISSION OF TEXT              | RECEPTION OF TEXT  |
|------------------|--|-----------------------------------|--------------------|
| <b>Deep Ken</b>  | intention of divine author                 | beauty of script and medium       | attitude of reader |
|                  |  | tradition of interpretation       |                    |
|                  |  | language of manuscript            |                    |
| <b>Plain Ken</b> | intention of human author                  |                                   |                    |
|                  | (“original”) language used by human author |                                   |                    |
|                  | historical circumstances of human author   | mistakes/ corrections by copyists |                    |

Table 11.1 Determining Textual Truth and Meaning.

It is easy to find humour in the gap between the kens. The *Robot Chicken* television series depicts a stormtrooper taking his daughter to work.<sup>4</sup> For the plain ken, the events of the Star Wars canon take place in historical time, so stormtroopers have children, and go to the bathroom, even if that is nowhere explicit in the canon. In the comic strip *Bloom County* the penguin Opus travels to Antarctica and is surprised to encounter into his neighbour. “Small world,” he says. “Small strip,” she counters.<sup>5</sup> Bloom County as a canon is a closed world, inhabited not—as

4 “Robot Chicken: Star Wars Episode II,” *Robot Chicken*, Cartoon Network (16 November 2008).

5 Berkeley Breathed, *Bloom County* (17 January 1984).

the plain ken would think—by billions of people, but by the dozens who have explicitly appeared in the strip. Like Bloom County is a “small strip” with a limited cast of characters, so too the Bible is a “small canon” with a limited cast of characters. The plain ken relocates the canon into the historical world, with many, many more (mostly anonymous) characters.

In one seventh-century Indian satire, a monk is puzzled that the Pali canon has no passages praising sex and alcohol. He takes a plain-ken approach, by imagining that at some point in history puritanical editors had corrupted the text: “I am sure that those lazy wretched elders must have blotted out from the canonical books the ordinance regarding women and drinking of liquor to spite us, the youngsters.” His solution, also, is plain ken: he decides to quest for a manuscript old enough to include the pre-censored passages.<sup>6</sup>

Generally, the deep ken finds meaning in the text through allegory, and the plain ken finds meaning around the text through contextualization. The plain ken is critical rather than exegetical, shallow rather than deep, and considers history, not moral theology, the most important context. For example, consider the recurring observation that some verses appear to be missing from the Qur’an. One Qur’anic exegete explained the omission of a verse in deep-ken terms, appealing to the perfect brevity of the holy text. Another took a plain-ken approach to explain the omission occurring in history, and proposed that a domestic animal probably ate the sheet on which they had been written.<sup>7</sup>

## A Brief History of Interpretation, to 1400

To understand how interpretation in the fifteenth-century Near and Far West worked, this section steps back a millennium to offer a broader historical and geographical overview.

### The Muslim Plain-ken Quest for Flatness

Interpreters of the Qur’an distinguished between two kinds of interpretation (*tafsir*). On the one hand was interpretation via tradition and community, and, on the other, interpretation via intellect or personal opinion. Tradition preferred interpretation by tradition. Indeed, the word *tafsir* standing alone could be taken to refer specifically to that way of interpretation. A famous hadith quoted

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6 Mahendravikramavarman, *Mattavilasa Prahāsana*, trans. N. P. Unni (Trivandrum: College Book House, 1974), 78.

7 John Burton, *The Collection of the Qur’ān* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1977), 94–95, 104.

Muhammad as saying, “Whoever talks about the Qur’an on the basis of his personal opinion [*ray*] or from a position of ignorance, will surely occupy his seat in the Fire.”<sup>8</sup>

*Tafsir* was related to the verb *fassara*, to explain, and some scholars specified *tafsir* was about explaining rather than understanding. Since the Qur’an was the most important text, *tafsir* was often exclusively Qur’anic, although other important documents could be subject to it as well. *Tafsir* typically provided a running commentary from the first word of the Qur’an to the last, and this format proved popular in our period. Sometimes, the commentary was literally written in the margins of a Qur’an.<sup>9</sup>

There was a limit to interpretation. Al-Suyuti (1445–1505) noted that the Qur’an itself stipulated (3:7, 39:23, 11:1) that some of its verses were clear, some ambiguous, and some were both. The ambiguous verses (*mutashabih*) precluded interpretation, for their knowledge was restricted to God. Because of the possibility of thus introducing errors, the most cautious scholars of the Qur’an hesitated to do any interpretation at all.<sup>10</sup>

Medievals, Muslim as well as Christian, allowed scripture passages to have multiple senses. Ibn Qutayba (d. 889) argued for allowing metaphor in revelation. Sahl Tustari (d. 896) counted four ways to interpret the same passage: the literal (*zahir*), the symbolic (*batin*), the prescriptive (*hudud*), and the spiritual (*matla*). To try to understand the meaning of figurative language in revelation, ‘Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani (1009–78) developed powerful tools like spiritual reading and attention to context. Ibn Arabi (1165–1240) asserted that different readers could interpret the Qur’an differently, with all those various interpretations reflecting the text’s true meaning: “God knows all these meanings, and there is

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- 8 Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *Qur’anic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1991), 20.
- 9 Ismail Hakki (d. 1725) includes Hafiz’s poems in his *tafsir*. Sheila Blair, *Islamic Calligraphy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2006), 28, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781474464475>; Frederick M. Denny, “Exegesis and Recitation: Their Development as Classical Forms of Qur’anic Piety,” in *Transitions and Transformations in the History of Religions*, ed. Frank E. Reynolds and Theodore M. Ludwig (Brill: Leiden, 1980), 91–123 (93); Alan Godlas, “Sūfism,” in *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur’ān*, ed. Andrew Rippin (Malden: Blackwell, 2006), 351–60 (358); Andrew Rippin, “The Designation of ‘Foreign’ Languages in the Exegesis of the Qur’an,” in *With Reverence for the Word: Medieval Scriptural Exegesis in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Barry D. Walfish, and Joseph W. Goering (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003), 437–43 (443).
- 10 Al-Suyuti, *Le parfait manuel des sciences coraniques al-Itqān fi ‘ulūm al-Qur’ān de Ġalāl ad-Dīn as-Suyūṭī (849/1445–911/1505)*, trans. Michel Lagarde (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 715–44 (ch. 43), <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004357112>. See Leah Kinberg, “Ambiguous,” in *Encyclopedia of the Qur’ān*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe, 5 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2001), I, 70–73; McAuliffe, *Qur’anic*, 20.

none that is not the expression of what he wanted to say to the given person.” The Egyptian scholar Al-Zarkashi (1344–92) marvelled how “every verse can be understood in 6,000 ways, and what then still remains to be understood is more still.”<sup>11</sup>

Slowly but steadily, *tafsir* developed a clear preference for literal or flat (*zahir*) interpretation. Ibn Kathir (ca. 1300–73) said the text had only one meaning, for Allah was not a poet, but wrote clearly and literally. Because the Qur’an insisted, usually, on its own clarity, unclear interpretations were suspect. Generally the *zahir* interpretation had priority unless another verse, a circumstance of fact, or a tradition of the Prophet’s companions challenged it. In probabilistic analysis, *zahir* came to refer to the more likely, as in law (between the certain and the speculative) or in the Qur’an itself—as when al-Qurtubi (1214–73) pointed to 61:14’s calling Jesus’s disciples “*zahir*-ists” because they had the better argument.<sup>12</sup>

The obvious was not always obvious. How did one know which interpretation was the most *zahir*?<sup>13</sup> The most immediate approach was to identify and rely on the best authorities. Pursuing the meaning, *tafsir* took particular interest in the transmission of the Qur’an from Muhammad to and through his followers. Ibn Taymiyya (1263–1328) and Ibn Kathir outlined a hierarchy of authorities in interpretation: the Qur’an itself, and accounts of the life of Muhammad, of his companions, and of those companions’ successors. Ibn Taymiyya allowed that prophets, even Muhammad, might err, but held that God protected them from continuing to err without correcting themselves.<sup>14</sup>

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- 11 Navid Kermani, *God Is Beautiful* (Chichester: John Wiley and Sons Ltd., 2014), 105; John Wansbrough, *Qur’anic Studies* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977), 236, 242; Ludmila Zamah, “Master of the Obvious: Understanding Zahir interpretations in Qur’anic Exegesis,” in *Aims, Methods and Contexts of Qur’anic Exegesis (2nd/8th–9th/15th Centuries)*, ed. Karen Bauer (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2014), 263–76 (265–66).
  - 12 Jane Dammen McAuliffe, “The Tasks and Traditions of Interpretation,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur’ān*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2006), 181–201 (198); Norman Calder, “Tafsir from Tabari to Ibn Kathir,” in *Approaches to the Qur’an*, ed. G. R. Hawting and Abdul-Kader A. Shareef (London: Routledge, 1993), 101–40 (124); Robert M. Gleave, “Conceptions of the Literal Sense (zāhir, ḥaqīqa) in Muslim Interpretive Thought,” in *Interpreting Scriptures in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, ed. Mordechai Z. Cohen and Adele Berlin (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2016), 183–203, <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9781107588554.009>; Wael Hallaq, “Zāhir,” in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. P. J. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C. E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W. P. Heinrichs, 12 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1960–2002), XI, 388; Zamah, “Master of the Obvious,” 266–67.
  - 13 Ignaz Goldhizer, *The Zāhirīs: Their Doctrine and Their History, a Contribution to the History of Islamic Theology*, trans. Wolfgang Behn (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 117 talks of this issue as a question of “exegetical taste.”
  - 14 Ibn Taymiyya, “Treatise on the Principles of Tafsir,” in *Windows on the House of Islam: Muslim Sources on Spirituality and Religious Life*, ed. John Renard (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), 35–43. See McAuliffe, *Qur’anic*, 17.

Beyond this appreciation of tradition as a safety net, *zahir* could be achieved through two prongs of a plain-ken strategy, a philological interest in the particulars of language and a historical interest in the particulars of context.<sup>15</sup>

### Strategy I: Philology

An Arabic word's consonantal skeleton expressed its basic meaning, and the vowel variations added nuances both subtle and critical, such as subject, object, and tense. The consonants in the Qur'an had remained stable since the time of Uthman, but how to vowel it? Vowels were crucial. An error in vocalization could outrageously alter the text's meaning. To borrow an example from the mischievous eleventh-century al-Abi, moving a dot in 3:192's أَخْرَيْتَهُ *akhzaytahu* to أَخْرَيْتَهُ *akhraytahu* changed God having "annihilated him for good" into God "makes him continuously defecate."<sup>16</sup> Such potential hazards required careful philological attention.

Without written vowels and dots, you could not read the Qur'an unless you already knew how to read it. According to tradition, the caliph sent with the newly canonized canon people who could orally fill in the vowels and consonant points. A variety of textual forms arose, apparently from dialectical differences. Tradition developed a plain-ken explanation for this variety: the Prophet varied vocalization when he recited the same text at different times. The tenth century saw the stabilization of seven textual traditions.<sup>17</sup>

The eighth through tenth centuries saw something like an Arabic philological renaissance. Non-Arabic words and obscure passages challenged the sense of a deep-ken Qur'an and provoked our pioneer philologists. Philology developed into specialized sub-fields, and spilt over for use outside the Qur'an. One branch of philological study focused on discussions of difficult words; another conducted the careful study of the various readings. Ibn Qutayba established canons of interpretation in works such as his *Interpretation of Difficult Qur'anic Passages*.<sup>18</sup>

15 Zamah, "Master of the Obvious," 270.

16 Ulrich Marzolph, "Humor," in *Encyclopedia of the Qur'an*, ed. McAuliffe, II, 464–65; Harald Motzki, "Alternative Accounts of the Qur'an's Formation," in *Cambridge Companion to the Qur'an*, ed. McAuliffe, 59–76 (62).

17 William A. Graham and Navid Kermani, "Recitation and Aesthetic Reception," in *Cambridge Companion to the Qur'an*, ed. McAuliffe, 115–42 (116–18).

18 Frederick Mathewson Denny, "Qur'anic Recitation," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World*, ed. John L. Esposito, 6 vols. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009), IV, 489–93; Claude Gilliot, "Creation of a Fixed Text," in *Cambridge Companion to the Qur'an*, ed. McAuliffe, 41–58 (48–49); Alexander Knysh, "Multiple Areas of Influence," in *Cambridge Companion to the Qur'an*, ed. McAuliffe, 211–34 (212–14).



In attempting to understand the Qur'an, these scholars took a plain-ken approach: Arabic had a history. To understand Qur'anic Arabic, one had to study pre-Islamic Arabic poetry. Qur'anic studies thus birthed literary studies. For example, Sibawayhi (ca. 760–96), to understand the “correct diction and usage” of the Qur'an text, turned to early poetry and to the contemporary Bedouin language, considered the most conservative and therefore purest form of Arabic.<sup>19</sup>

Sibawayhi never seriously proposed replacing orthodox readings with those derived from Bedouin pronunciation, but even raising this hypothetical shocked his contemporaries.<sup>20</sup> In the early tenth century, Ibn Miqdam (d. 944) accepted any vowelings that was not ungrammatical, but Ibn Mujahid (859/60–936) brought judicial pressure on him to make him recant.<sup>21</sup> Before our period, some scholars were not certain that the Qur'an they had was the same as the deep-ken Qur'an in heaven. Does truth bow down to the Bedouin? Do we use the norms of pre-Islamic poetry to judge the deep-ken Qur'an?<sup>22</sup>

In the eighth and ninth centuries, these philologist pioneers sometimes realized that they might have gone terribly astray. Some piously gave up philology; others counterbalanced possible philological damage by making and donating copies of the Qur'an—with the traditional textual form. Others, like Sibawayhi, continued in their philology but declined to apply their results over and above orthodox tradition (rather like Lorenzo Valla (1407–57), as we shall see below).

A few, like Abu 'Ubayda (728–825), fully accepted philology. Abu 'Ubayda argued that God's decision to express the deep-ken Qur'an in plain-ken Arabic brought divine favour upon that language *in all its varieties*, and he felt free to make use of even pre-Islamic poetry. The language of the Qur'an was identical to the language of the pagan “Bedouins who urinate on their heels.” Abu 'Ubayda even historicized the first philologists of the Qur'an: they quoted the Bedouins because at that time those philologists spoke that language. For Abu 'Ubayda and like-minded thinkers, the problems in the language of the Qur'an text were themselves praiseworthy, and part of the overall miracle. We will see this extraordinary impulse, to find the beauty usually restricted to the deep ken even in the conditional and plain, recur in this book. Over time this led to a

19 Knysh, “Multiple Areas of Influence,” 226.

20 Lothar Kopf, “Religious Influences on Medieval Arabic Philology,” *Studia Islamica* 5 (1956): 33–49 (46).

21 Gilliot, “Creation,” 50. This is Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan ibn Ya'qūb al-ʿAṭṭār Ibn Miqdam (d. 944).

22 Knysh, “Multiple Areas of Influence,” 213–14; Aliza Shnizer, “Sacrality and Collection,” in *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'an*, ed. Rippin, 159–71 (165–69), <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118964873.ch10>

split in Qur'an scholars, between those who deferred to dogma and those who deferred to their own research. For Abu 'Ubayda, however, the deep ken could encompass the seemingly plain.<sup>23</sup>

### Strategy 2: History

Because of the emphasis on the literal *zahir*, from after the time of al-Tabari's (839–923) great work *tafsir* became more interested in historical context, especially regarding the history of Christianity. 'Abd al-Jabbar (935–1025) and other Mu'tazilite theologians even argued that the fact that the Qur'an had been heard verbally by Muhammad proved that it was not eternal and must have itself been created in spacetime.<sup>24</sup>

### Abrogation (*naskh*)

One way to deal with contradictions in revelation was through the idea of abrogation, which held that God suppressed, or abrogated, an old revelation in favour of a new. The earlier revelation was valid for only a limited period, before the newer verse abrogated it. Thus, one verse, taken in context, could qualify, modify, or cancel a second. For example, 5:90, forbidding wine, abrogated 2:219 and 4:43, allowing wine. The apparent contradiction was in fact a juxtaposition of a major verse with an abrogated verse. Some verses, and even an entire surah, had—according to commentators—been abrogated, removed entirely from the Qur'an, and disappeared.<sup>25</sup>

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- 23 Ella Almagor, "The Early Meaning of Majāz and the Nature of Abū 'Ubayda's Exegesis," in *Studia Orientalia Memoriae D. Z. Baneth Dedicata*, ed. Joshua Blau, Shlomo Pines, Meir Jacob Kister, and Shaul Shaked (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1979), 307–26 (310–11, 322); Knysh, "Multiple Areas of Influence," 214–15; Claude Gilliot, *Exégèse, Langue et Théologie en Islam: L'exégèse coranique de Tabari* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1990), 78, 96–97, 116–17, 221, 243.
- 24 Mahmoud M. Ayoub, "Towards an Islamic Christology," *Muslim World* 66 (1976): 163–88; Mahmoud Seyedy and Ehsan Kordi Ardakani, "Critical Review of the Mu'tazilī Theory of the Creation (Ḥudūth) of the Qur'an in Qāḍī Abd al-Jabbār's Opinion, Regarding Imam Reza's Narrations," *International Journal of Multicultural and Multireligious Understanding* 6 (2019): 328–39, <http://dx.doi.org/10.18415/ijmmu.v6i4.985>; Yasin Ceylan, *Theology and Tafsīr in the Major Works of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization 1996), 136–46.
- 25 Knysh, "Multiple Areas of Influence," 217; McAuliffe, "The Tasks," 187; David S. Powers, "The Exegetical Genre nāsikh al-Qur'an wa mansūkhuhu," in *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'an*, ed. Andrew Rippin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 117–38 (122); Andrew Rippin, "The Exegetical Literature

An abrogating verse could have devastating impact on others. Most famous was the Sword Verse (9:5) which, according to some, abrogated over a hundred earlier verses that urged any kind of moderation towards non-Muslims. In the medieval period, over two hundred verses were identified as abrogated, as, for example, by al-Farisi in the eleventh century. Since revelation had direct legal force, abrogation had a direct legal impact on daily life. Misidentifying an abrogation, to take the cancelled revelation as valid and the valid one as cancelled, was dangerous.<sup>26</sup>

Studies of abrogation introduced the topic, and then went *surah* by *surah* to consider examples. Typically, they listed the abrogating and abrogated verses, while making notes of any controversies in the selection or categorization. This had been an especially popular genre in the four centuries before our period, and so it was well established by 1400.

Some theologians found the idea of abrogation itself challenging, as it worked against the deep *ken's* vision of a God who would not change his mind. Its defenders pointed out that the Qur'an itself justified abrogation (2:106, 16:101, 87:6–7). Moreover, the Qur'an implicitly justified abrogation the moment it presented itself as a document composed in time, in history.<sup>27</sup>

#### Contextualization ("Occasions of Revelation," *asbab al-nuzul*)

Such knowledge of abrogation came from the Qur'an itself, but other sources revealed the context of a revelation, which could be used to evaluate an interpretation. What appeared to be a revelation's true meaning was suddenly less certain when the context was taken into account. The context of a revelation informed, and indeed restricted, the possible interpretations an exegete could apply to it. Thus became necessary expert knowledge of the historical context of the occasions (literally, the "descent") of the revelation (*asbab al-nuzul*). Such context could be useful in resolving questions of which verse abrogated and which was abrogated, as the verse consonate with historical custom would be identified as later and, therefore, as the abrogating one. 'Ali ibn Ahmad al-Wahidi (d. 1075) initiated *asbab al-nuzul* material as a specific area of study, although he

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of Abrogation: Form and Content," in *Studies in Islamic and Middle Eastern Texts and Traditions in Memory of Norman Calder*, ed. G. R. Hawting, J. A. Mojaddedi, and A. Samely (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), 213–31.

26 Knysh, "Multiple Areas of Influence," 217; Powers, "Exegetical Genre," 119–22, 130.

27 John Burton, "Abrogation," in *Encyclopedia of the Qur'an*, ed. McAuliffe, I, 11–19; McAuliffe, "The Tasks," 187; Knysh, "Multiple Areas of Influence," 217.

took a literal approach, in that he collected all information that was explicitly identified as context by the phrase *nazalat fi* “it was revealed with respect to.”<sup>28</sup>

A few scholars went even further, by emphasizing the historical context, or the understood historical context, even if that involved breaking the exegetical tradition. Ibn Taymiyya and his student Ibn Kathir admitted that Muhammad thought the Qur’an could be interpreted, but they insisted on following only Muhammad’s interpretations. They wanted to return to the practices of Muslim calendar’s first century, and thus elevated hadith given by the Prophet. They were concerned that tradition had become tainted by non-canonical sources—or worse, by sources from a non-Muslim canon. They did not share their contemporaries’ enthusiasm for diversity in *tafsir*. Ibn Taymiyya thundered against the extraneous additions that distracted from real meaning. Such scholars attempted to fill in the blank spots in prophetic lives, and thus to provide historical context to deep-ken revelation.<sup>29</sup>

One scholar even looked at the historical context of how the Qur’an was read in his own day. Al-Zarkashi (1344–92) described a plain-ken psychology of reception: “If the listener is a believer, the blissful thrill and the sublime feeling seize him straight away, and his heart feels an unceasing attraction to and love for the Qur’an. And if the listener is a denier, he still feels this thrill in his heart, but it is mixed with something distressing and admonishing that makes his agitation gain the upper hand over the beauty of what he is hearing.”<sup>30</sup>

### Comparative Canon Study before 1400

Muslims used the Bible negatively and positively, that is, both to point out its corruptions and to collect evidence for the prophethood of Muhammad. The Qur’an praised the Gospels as “full of guidance and light” (5:46). Muslims found references to Muhammad enduring even in the corrupted Gospel, in references to the Messiah, and at Jn 15:26: “When the Advocate comes, whom

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28 Stephen Burge, “Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti, the Mu’awwidhatan and the Modes of Exegesis,” in *Aims, Methods and Contexts*, ed. Bauer, 283; Knysh, “Multiple Areas of Influence,” 277–310 (217); Andrew Rippin, “The Construction of the Arabian Historical Context in Muslim Interpretation of the Qur’an,” in *Aims, Methods and Contexts*, ed. Bauer, 179–87; Andrew Rippin, “The Function of Asbāb al-nuzūl in Qur’anic Exegesis,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 51 (1988): 1–20 (8–9).

29 G. C. Anawati, “‘īsā,” in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, ed. Bearman et al., IV, 85–86; Calder, “Tafsir from Tabari,” 130; Jane Dammen McAuliffe, “Qur’anic Hermeneutics: The Views of al-Tabari and Ibn Kathir,” in *Approaches*, ed. Rippin, 46–62.

30 Quoted in Kermani, *God Is Beautiful*, 44.

I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify about me.”<sup>31</sup>

Because the Christian canon was known to be faulty, Muslim scholars could be more aggressive in their plain-ken approach, without fear of impious consequences. Some scholars understood the extant Greek Gospels as poor translations of the true, original Gospels, which had been written in Hebrew. Scholars developed an impressive critical apparatus in their study of *tahrif*, the falsification of the Gospels. Drawing on Jewish and Christian extra-canonical sources, they picked at contradictions between the Jewish and Christian canons and history, as well as contradictions among the Gospels themselves. They pointed to the appalling immoral behaviour of the Old Testament figures and explained this as manipulation by editors like Ezra.<sup>32</sup>

Let us consider some examples. Muslim scholars consulted multiple translations of non-Islamic canon material as well as the historical development of Judaism. In Andalusia, the Muslim scholar Ibn Hazm (994–1064) launched a plain-ken attack on the Old and New Testaments. He used the dramatic and up-heaving narrative history recorded in the Old Testament to argue that the Torah, the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, could not have been preserved through this history. When Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem (587 BC), the written Torah would have been destroyed, and survived only in the unreliable memory of the prophet Ezra. Ibn Hazm explicitly and powerfully argued that the contradictions he found in the Torah and the Gospel showed that they had been profoundly corrupted in transmission. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (1292–1350) argued that the mirror image between Jewish and Christian understandings of Jesus demonstrated that the Christians had artificially created their image of Jesus by flipping around the Jewish image: the Christians “saw that the Jews believed Jesus was a mad magician and a bastard, so they said: ‘He is God perfect and the son of God.’”<sup>33</sup>

What version of non-Islamic canons were these scholars using? In the fourteenth century, even Muslim converts born Jewish were inaccurate in their quotation of Hebrew scriptures. Perhaps they were attempting to quote the pre-corrupted original scripture. One such convert was ‘Abd al-Haqq al-Islami, active in Morocco at the end of the fourteenth century. He lamented that the

31 Wansbrough, *Qur’anic Studies*, 63–64.

32 Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds: Medieval Islam and Bible Criticism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1992), 50–74; Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, “Some Neglected Aspects of Medieval Muslim Polemics against Christianity,” *Harvard Theological Review* 89 (1996): 61–84 (64–65).

33 Ibn Hazm, *Abenházam de Córdoba y su historia crítica de las ideas religiosas*, trans. Miguel Asín Palacios, 5 vols. (Madrid: Academia de la Historia, 1927–32), esp. II and III. See Goldhizer, *The Zāhirīs*, 103–59; Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, 138;

Jews had profoundly corrupted their scripture, and “I am going to cast their own stones upon them, and flog them with their own assertions.” Indeed, he used Hosea 9:7 (which Jesus seems to quote at Lk 21:22) to attack them: “Because your sins are so many / and your hostility so great, / the prophet is considered a fool, / the inspired person a maniac”—for, later, the Jews did in fact consider Muhammad a fool. Al-Islami used a deep-ken textual analysis that needed the original language to work. The comprehensiveness of canon and the importance of Muhammad suggested that the Jewish scripture itself must have references to him, and al-Islami proceeded to find them. He uncovered the consonant skeleton of “Muhammad” מַחְמַד at 1 Kings 22:35 מוֹמַד *mo’omad* (“propped up”) and at Hosea 9:6 מַחְמַד *makhmad* (“the pleasant”). Using deep-ken numerology, he calculated that the value of Genesis 1.16’s word הַגְדֹלִים *haggedolim* (“greater”) equaled the sum of the value of מַחְמַד and the value (six) of Friday. Similarly, in Genesis 12:9, Abraham’s destination “Negeb” had the same value as “Mecca.”<sup>34</sup>

A few scholars in the fourteenth century took care in quoting non-Islamic canon; Ibn Taymiyya complained about problems with the Arabic translation of Hebrew canon. Most, however, were remarkably sloppy. Ibn Khaldun was interested in non-Islamic canons, but apparently had no Arabic translations of them.<sup>35</sup>

Apparent contradictions within and among the Hebrew Bible, the Gospels, and the Qur’an prompted especially Muslim and Jewish scholars to consider the historical context for the composition and transmission of scripture. Despite developing these more aggressive and powerful historicizing weapons, Islamic scholars rarely applied them to the Qur’an itself, which was, after all, the touchstone of truth.<sup>36</sup>

Much of this resembles later Christian criticism of the Bible and may indeed have inspired it. To some degree, this happened through medieval Jewish intermediaries. Jewish scholars had developed their own interpretive model that valued the flat meaning, called *peshat*. The Talmudic scholar Saadia Gaon (ca. 892–942), known as the “father of *peshat*,” had been influenced by earlier Qur’anic scholarship, and we see parallels between his and ibn Hazm’s prioritizing the literal meaning, unless, as each specifies, it contradicted your senses, your reason, another unambiguous verse, or tradition. In northern Iberia, the Jewish scholar Abraham ibn Ezra (ca. 1089–1164) developed similar

34 Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, 124–25; Haggai Mazuz, “Additional Contributions of ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq al-Islāmī to the Muslim-Jewish Polemic,” *Al-Qanṭara* 37 (2016): 111–28; M. Perlman, “‘Abd al-Ḥaqq al-Islāmī, a Jewish Convert,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 31 (1940): 177–82.

35 Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, 125–29.

36 Lazarus-Yafeh, “Some Neglected,” 66.

criticisms, in particular finding anachronisms in Genesis and Deuteronomy. Ibn Ezra, who read Arabic and travelled widely, even spending time in Baghdad, might have encountered and drawn from the ideas of Ibn Hazm. A century later, the Christian scholar Raymond Martini (d. after 1284), who had studied Arabic at Mallorca, defended both the Torah and Gospel against Ibn Hazm—but in doing so used the same plain-ken appeal to history. The Torah was not destroyed at the Fall of Jerusalem, he argued, because the Jews going into exile would have physically taken it with them, just as exiled Jews did in Martini’s own time.<sup>37</sup> Various European-regional expulsions of the Jews in the thirteenth, fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries likely spread this Jewish and Islamic plain-ken text criticism even further. We even have something like a smoking gun in Baruch Spinoza’s (1632–77) 1670 *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* [Theologico-Political Treatise], which explicitly commended Abraham ibn Ezra’s work on historical-editorial processes.<sup>38</sup> Muslims invented this kind of plain-ken canon-criticism, and Jews made it available to Christians.<sup>39</sup>

### The Christian Deep-ken Quest for Depth

In the medieval period, the high level of plain-ken and philological interest developed by the Muslims towards the Qur’an was not equalled by the Christians towards their own Bible. Where the Muslims had developed a highly sophisticated philological technology centuries earlier, only in the Late Traditional period did the Christians develop something similar.

#### *A Limited Plain Ken*

Christian scholars had long had some plain-ken insight into the ability of humans to err, but this had limited impact. Some theologians recognized the possibility

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- 37 Mordechai Z. Cohen, “Emergence of the Rule of Peshat in Medieval Jewish Bible Exegesis,” in *Interpreting Scriptures*, ed. Cohen and Berlin, 204–24 (207–10); Gleave, “Conceptions,” 184; Harvey J. Hames, “A Jew amongst Christians and Muslims: Introspection in Solomon Ibn Adret’s Response to Ibn Hazm,” *Mediterranean Historical Review* 25 (2010): 203–19, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518967.2010.536667>; Lazarus-Yafehg, *Intertwined Worlds*, 139–41.
- 38 Baruch Spinoza, *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (1670), chapter 8, explicitly cites Abraham ibn Ezra. See Richard Popkin, “A Late Seventeenth-Century Gentile Attempt to Convert the Jews to Reformed Judaism,” in *Israel and the Nations*, ed. Shmuel Ettinger and Shmuel Almog (Jerusalem: Historical Society of Israel, 1987), xxv–xxviii (xxxiii).
- 39 The influence worked in both direction: Jews had a great, and Christians a significant, earlier influence on how *tafsir* developed.

that the Holy Spirit allowed humans involved in the creation and transmission of scripture to make mistakes. Augustine (354–430) knew Bible manuscripts did not always match, and Alcuin of York (d. 804) was pained by the errors in the Latin Bible. Peter Abelard (ca. 1079–1142) suspected copying errors had corrupted the New Testament but did not seem to much care. Duns Scotus (ca. 1266–1308) allowed that human participants might introduce untruths for a variety of motivations, including under the influence of bribery. In general, scholars were most open to the possibility of errors occurring in copying Bible manuscripts closest to their own time.<sup>40</sup>

An obviously problematic version of the Vulgate was standardized in Paris in the thirteenth century. In reaction, the Dominicans consulted a variety of manuscripts in an attempt to agree on a correct, restored version of the Vulgate, but only to correct recent copying errors; there was no sense that the Vulgate itself might contain errors. Roger Bacon (1220–92), of the rival Franciscan order, pointed out that these corrections just made a bad situation worse, as the multiplication of lists of errors accumulated their own errors as they were copied. Without a technology to reproduce documents uniformly, the thirteenth-century solutions of standardization and correction only added to the chaos.<sup>41</sup>

These half-hearted and haphazard efforts to correct the Latin Vulgate rarely extended to reaching into the Greek texts behind it. Nicholas of Lyra (ca. 1270–1349), too, knew that the Vulgate manuscripts disagreed, but he did not know Greek, and the disagreements did not encourage him to learn it.<sup>42</sup>

Motivated by their desire to imitate Jesus precisely and historically, in the thirteenth century some theologians, often Franciscan, took a special interest in the historical circumstances of the New Testament and its Greek text. Petrus Comestor (1100–78), for example, located the Gospels within a broader

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40 Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson, *A History of Biblical Interpretation, Vol. 2: The Medieval through the Reformation Periods* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 8; Daniel Hobbins, *Authorship and Publicity before Print: Jean Gerson and the Transformation of Late Medieval Learning* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 27, <https://doi.org/10.9783/9780812202298>; Cornelia Linde, *How to Correct the Sacra Scriptura? Textual Criticism of the Latin Bible between the Twelfth and Fifteenth Centuries* (Oxford: Society for the Study of Medieval Languages and Literature, 2012); Alastair Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages* (Aldershot: Wildwood, 1988), 59–63; G. R. Evans, *Language and Logic of the Bible: The Road to Reformation* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1985), 15–16.

41 Evans, *Language and Logic*, 71; Raphael Loewe, “The Medieval History of the Latin Vulgate,” in *Cambridge History of the Bible*, ed. G. W. H. Lampe, 3 vols. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1963), II, 146–42.

42 Jerry H. Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ: New Testament Scholarship in the Renaissance* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1983), 22; Loewe, “Medieval History,” 152.



Roman history.<sup>43</sup> This plain-ken approach met fierce criticism at the time. Peter Cantor (d. 1197) bemoaned the pointlessness of investigating the “vain and superfluous” accidents of history, such as “the locations of places, numbers of years and times, genealogies and technical descriptions of buildings...” The thirteenth century lost interest in the plain ken, and took Peter Cantor’s advice to return to “faith and moral doctrine.”<sup>44</sup>

A handful of scholars were moving towards treating the Bible as any book, essentially in the plain ken. One thirteenth-century treatise explicitly affirmed that “words are arbitrary.” At times, both Nicholas of Lyra and Richard FitzRalph (ca. 1300–60) approached canon content with the plain ken.<sup>45</sup>

### *Deep-ken Bible: Timeless Symbols*

Henry of Langenstein (ca. 1325–97) found proof of deep-ken meaning in the Bible itself, in Jesus’s words: “For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished” (Mt 5:18) and “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away” (24:35). Thought was above text. Text was fickle in its changing meanings, but the thought, the real meaning, endured.<sup>46</sup>

On similar grounds, John Wycliffe (ca. 1328–84) and his followers strongly resisted the plain ken’s vision of the Bible being something like other books. The Bible, Wycliffe argued, was “of infinitely greater authority than other writings” and Jesus “thanks to his vision infinitely excels any of his brothers.” Unlike

43 David Luscombe, “Peter Comestor,” in *The Bible in the Medieval World: Essays in Memory of Beryl Smalley*, ed. Katherine Walsh and Diana Wood (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), 109–29 (119).

44 Petrus Cantor, *Verbum Abbreviatum*, in *Patrologia Latina*, ed. J.-P. Migne, 217 vols. (Paris: Garnier, 1855), CCV, col. 27–28. See Beryl Smalley, *The Gospels in the Schools, c.1100–c.1280* (London: Hambledon, 1985), 74, 102–03. For the development of medieval interest in “history” as such, see R. W. Southern, “Aspects of the European Tradition of Historical Writing: 2. Hugh of St. Victor and the Idea of Historical Development,” in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 21 (1971): 159–79 (163–77).

45 “Commentary on the Barbarismus (attributed to Robert Kilwardby), ca. 1250,” in *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric: Language Arts and Literary Theory, A.D. 300–1475*, trans. Rita Copeland and Ineke Sluiter (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012), 724–34 (730), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:osobl/9780199653782.003.0045>

46 Henry of Langenstein, “Contra quendam eremitam de ultimis temporibus vaticinantem nomine theolophorum,” in *Thesaurus anecdotorum novissimus seu veterum monumentorum*, ed. Bernardo Pezio (Augsburg: n.p., 1721), col. 527–29. See Christopher Ocker, *Biblical Poetics before Humanism and Reformation* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2002), 178–79.

normal books, the Bible was free from error: if you think you see an error, you are wrong, and you should be more pious and careful when you read it. One manuscript, so sufficiently in line with Wycliffe's thinking that it had once been attributed to him, sniped that the question of how to distinguish the Bible from other books was precisely what "the Antichrist's clerics" ask. In answer, it notes that only "kindred of whoredom seeks signs," an allusion to Jesus's "a wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign!" (Mt 12:39). Proof of the Bible's exceptionalism lay in the fact that Jesus had left it "to comfort his Church."<sup>47</sup>

Unlike Muslims who so carefully studied how the Qur'an had been revealed in history, through time, most Christians emphasized the uniformity of the Bible, which was pointedly not a historical document. The Bible was united and integral in its content, because a single divine author had inspired the human prophets and evangelists. Each book consonated with the Bible as a whole.

Today, many readers see the Bible primarily as a historical document that also speaks to the present. At the beginning of our period, the reverse was true: the Bible was primarily a present, contemporary, living document that happened to make references to the past. It was ontologically different than other books. Not unreasonably, Henry of Langenstein, for example, was more interested in the moment of cognition in the reader at the time of reading than in the moment of writing many centuries ago.<sup>48</sup>

The Bible was for the resolution of theological arguments—not for study in its own right. Theology, a relatively new concept not appearing as such until the twelfth century, was precisely the study of the Bible—but, by the fourteenth century, theology was less interested in the Bible except as a somewhat underused authority. For fourteenth-century theologians, scriptural events were theological references to their own time, to the fourteenth century. The Bible was less historical than theological, and theology was the discipline that studied the Bible; they read the Bible to understand theology and studied theology

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47 John Wycliffe [attributed], "[On the Sufficiency of Holy Scripture]," in *Select English Works*, ed. Thomas Arnold, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1871), III, 186–87; John Wycliffe, *De Veritate Sacrae Scripturae*, ed. Rudolf Buddensieg, 3 vols. (London: Trübner, 1905), I, 394. See Stephen Penn, "Truth, Time and Sacred Text: Responses to Medieval Nominalism in John Wyclif's *Summa de ente* and *De veritate sacrae scripturae*" (DPhil thesis, University of York, 1998), 153; A. J. Minnis, "'Authorial Intention' and 'Literal Sense' in the Exegetical Theories of Richard Fitzralph and John Wyclif: An Essay in the Medieval History of Biblical Hermeneutic," *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy: Archaeology, Culture, History, Literature* 75 (1975): 1–31 (13–15).

48 Ocker, *Biblical Poetics*, 51–52, 60, 71, 175.

to understand the Bible. Whether theology was about eternal truths or about application to society in 1400, it was not historical.<sup>49</sup>

If the Bible and its content were not historical, what—or better, when—was it, exactly? The deep ken allowed interpreters to find deep meaning in what could have been flat history. The Catalan theologian and sometimes inquisitor Nicholas Eymerich (ca. 1316–99), for example, in a 1377 commentary read the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew not as a history of a family tree that stretched back from Abraham to Jesus, but as a discussion of Christology. Similarly, Nicholas of Lyra's commentary on this genealogy offered a poetical and numerical resonance, like a checksum: the 42 generations represented the arithmetical product of 3 (the Trinity) and 14 (the 4 Gospels plus the 10 Commandments). For Lyra, Jesus chose 12 disciples because 12 equals 3 (Trinity) times 4 (Corners of the World). To Eymerich, Jesus delivered the Sermon on the Mount not just to first-century Palestinians but to persecuted clergy, either atemporally or in Eymerich's own time.<sup>50</sup>

Wycliffe helps us here with explicit justification of such approaches. Wycliffe read the Bible for its eternal and deep-ken truths, truths outside of time and the temporal. They were as close to him in the fourteenth century as they were to people in the first century. If a Bible was historical, it was only because someone was reading and accessing its eternal truths in human time.<sup>51</sup> Against accidental and contingent statements that were not eternal ("I am writing this sentence"), Wycliffe contrasted the statements in the New Testament, which were always true—even before they were written down, even before Jesus said them; Jesus also wrote the Pauline epistles written after his Ascension.<sup>52</sup> There was, therefore, no importance to the verb tenses in the New Testament: "Jesus existed," "Jesus exists," and "Jesus will exist" were all equally true to Wycliffe.

49 Evans, *Language and Logic*, 7, 109; Hauser and Watson, *A History of Biblical Interpretation*, 271; Beryl Smalley, "The Bible in the Medieval Schools," in *Cambridge History of the Bible*, ed. Lampe, II, 197–219 (198–99).

50 *Glossa ordinaria*, in Walafrid Strabo [attributed], *Opera omnia*, in *Patrologia Latina*, ed. Migne, CXIII, col. 379. See Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ*, 24–25.

51 Wycliffe, *De Veritate*, ed. Buddensieg, I, 50–51 (ch. 3), 156–58 (ch. 7), 188–90 (ch. 9). See Ocker, *Biblical Poetics*, 162; Beryl Smalley, *Studies in Medieval Thought and Learning from Abelard to Wyclif* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1981), 409–12; A. J. Minnis, "Authorial," 1–30.

52 Evans, *Language and Logic*, 113, 155. This is Kynyngham's unsympathetic recapitulation of Wycliffe. John Kynyngham, "Secundo determinatio," in Thomas Netter, *Fasciculi Zizaniorum Magistri Johannis Wyclif cum Tritico*, ed. Walter Waddington Shirley (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, and Roberts, 1858), 47–48. For Paul, see the sermon "Dominica prima Aduentus Domini," in *English Wycliffite Sermons*, ed. Anne Hudson and Pamela Gradon, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983–99), I, 475.

Wycliffe's Bible was so timeless that its prophets, in their own lifetimes, might not have understood the true meaning of their own prophecies.<sup>53</sup>

### *Allegory as a Problematic Interpretative Practice*

For centuries, theologians could read the Bible for the literal (plain-ken) and allegorical (deep-ken) senses of its words. Allegorical readings were especially helpful for making obscure or obscene passages clear and useful, and for making passages that superficially were purely historical still relevant to the present and the future—that is, to have the Bible work theologically. The allegorical readings were considered the more important, because they were eternal and more immediately relevant to readers' salvation. The obscurity of the allegorical sense could recommend it as being special, unlike the more accessible literal sense, which Adelard of Bath (twelfth century) described as a "harlot" because it exposes itself indiscriminately to everyone. We are a world away from contemporary Muslim scholars' elevation of *zahir*.<sup>54</sup>

This was not the projection of random interpretation (eisegesis), but the excavation of subsurface meaning in a text, made possible by the Bible's divine author and multiple layers of meaning. A similar deep-ken principle applied to the universe as a whole: because it was created by God, nature itself can have multiple meanings, and a colour, an animal, a number, an event could all enjoy a greater significance (higher, and superior) than their mundane meaning. Hugh of St. Victor (ca. 1096–1141) insisted that "All nature declares God. All nature teaches the human. All nature generates reason, and nothing in its universe is unfruitful."<sup>55</sup>

However, there had long been hesitation about allegorical interpretation. One medieval commentator, annoyed by an allegory that took the red colour of a sacrificial cow as a reference to the blood of Jesus, complained, "it would be all the same if the cow had been black; the allegory is worthless; whatever

53 John Wycliffe, *Sermones*, ed. Johann Loserth, 4 vols. (London: Trübner, 1887–90), I, 18. See Evans, *Language and Logic*, 17; Peter Øhrstrøm and Per F. V. Hasle, *Temporal Logic: From Ancient Ideas to Artificial Intelligence* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1995), 33–38.

54 Thomas Wright, ed., *Biographia Britannica Literaria* (London: Parker, 1846), 97. For an insightful survey of the development of the literal sense out of legal, historical, and grammatical discourses, see John Whitman, "The Literal Sense of Christian Scripture: Redefinition and Revolution," in *Interpreting Scriptures*, ed. Cohen and Berlin, 133–58. See also Alastair J. Minnis, "Figuring the Letter: Making Sense of Sensus litteralis in Late-medieval Christian Exegesis," in *Interpreting Scriptures*, ed. Cohen and Berlin, 159–82.

55 Hugh of St. Victor, "Eruditionis didascalice libri VII," in *Opera Omnia II*, in *Patrologia Latina*, ed. Migne, CLXXVI, col. 805. See Hauser and Watson, *A History of Biblical Interpretation*, 264.

the colour of the cow, some sort of allegory could be found for it.”<sup>56</sup> William of Ockham (1285–1347) complained that interpreters could *finguint* [make up] any allegorical sense they pleased.<sup>57</sup>

For a fictitious example that might not be too great an exaggeration we turn to Geoffrey Chaucer’s (d. 1400) *Wife of Bath*. In the preface to her tale, we can see how she understood the Gospels. She remembered Jesus’s pointed reply to the woman at the well, who had denied having “a” husband: “You have had five husbands, and the man who is with you now is not your husband” (Jn 5:18). Oblivious to Jesus’s humour and his insinuation, the *Wife of Bath* had understood the passage as an allegory, and, thus inspired, married five husbands since she was twelve years old (lines 4–6). She had recently been corrected, that it was certainly (“*certeyn*”) better to marry only once, not because she had mis-interpreted a Bible passage, but because she had missed the significance of another: Jesus had only been to one wedding, at Cana (lines 9–13). Note the deep ken’s double application: the Gospels only report Jesus attending one wedding, so Jesus had only attended one wedding, and so everyone should marry only once. The wife then cited the Gospel of Mark’s account of Jesus distributing barley bread, and concluded that this was an encouragement to have lots of marital sex: “In wifehood I will use my instrument / As freely as my Maker has it sent” (lines 149–50). If Jesus had wanted her to remain a virgin, he would have distributed bread of white flour.<sup>58</sup> Chaucer appreciated the dangers of allegorical interpretation.

Henry of Langenstein gave these problems sustained attention. Langenstein explained that the rough and obscure quality of the Biblical text itself encouraged allegorical readings, and that allegorical readings were necessary to pursue the highest goal of reading the Bible. Because of the way(s) language worked and readers read, the meaning of words could be unstable and ambiguous.<sup>59</sup> The real meaning of scripture, Langenstein wrote, was “not to be dragged to that meaning that each and every interpreter presumes for himself.” To avoid arbitrary, personal interpretation Langenstein proposed two remedies. The first was tradition, “the traditions of the fathers.” The second was “the circumstances

56 Stephen Langton (1150–1228), quoted in Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1964), 261.

57 William of Ockham, *Breviloquium de potestate papæ*, ed. L. Baudry (Paris: Vrin, 1937), 131. See Alastair Minnis, “Material Swords: The Status of Allegory in William of Ockham’s *Breviloquium on Papal Power*,” in *With Reverence for the Word*, ed. McAuliffe, Walfish, and Goering, 292–310 (301–03).

58 Mk 6 has the feeding of the five thousand, but does not mention the type of bread; Jn 6:13 refers to barley.

59 Henricus de Langenstein, *In prologum bibliae*, Mainz, Stadtbibliothek, Hs I 449, fol. 98va–vb. See Ocker, *Biblical Poetics*, 31, 142, 149, 152–53.

of scripture itself”: that is, “the meaning of the truth ought to be investigated from people, places, and times; from the situations of speaking, from the ways of speaking the languages or language in which it has been published.”<sup>60</sup> Below, we consider both of these solutions, traditions and circumstances.

### *Viable Alternative 1: Tradition*

Tradition had once been an attitude and a way of approaching the Bible, a respectful looking back at the thinkers who came before you, and a reading of the book of eternal truths with centuries of other readers, who could all read with you now because they, like you, were reading eternal truths. In the centuries right before our kickoff, tradition had solidified into a systematic set of ideas.<sup>61</sup>

At the beginning, God was his own authority, and that authority transferred to the Bible he had authored. Then, the Holy Spirit acted as a guarantor, which helped the councils in particular avoid adding new errors to tradition. In the same way, the Holy Spirit guaranteed the preservation of truth during the translation process. Thus, the Vulgate had full divine authority, because Jerome (d. 420) was consonant with tradition when he translated. Although Langenstein urged against bold assertions of the Holy Spirit’s intended meaning, he appreciated that divine guarantees preserved meaning even through metaphor: statements about vines were true also when understood to be about Christ. Langenstein noted that the inspiration of the Holy Spirit made the Bible comprehensive with respect to the knowledge necessary for salvation.<sup>62</sup>

A reader could access the intention of the Holy Spirit by interpreting the Bible in consonance with tradition.<sup>63</sup> To understand the real meaning, there must be a “synergy” between the reader, the human author, and the divine author. To access it, the reader needed, in the words of the historian Christopher Ocker, a “well-disposed soul—a soul whose will was habitually trained on God, bent on openness to divine influence, and committed to doing good.” Such allegorical

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60 Langenstein, *In prologum*, fol. 140va. See Ocker, *Biblical Poetics*, 152.

61 Ocker, *Biblical Poetics*, 76–77.

62 Langenstein, *In prologum*, fol. 232v–3r. See Evans, *Language and Logic*, 9, 24; Ocker, *Biblical Poetics*, 158, 176–78.

63 This comes from Denis, but is still mainstream in our period. Denis the Carthusian, *Enarratio in Genesim*, 5–469, in *Opera Omnia*, 11 vols. (Monstrolii: Typis Cartusiae S. M. de Pratis, 1896), I, 15 (art. 5). See Ocker, *Biblical Poetics*, 154.

reading was prescribed by Langenstein, Wycliffe, and also Matthias of Janov (d. 1393), who made the same point about observing images (see Chapter 15).<sup>64</sup>

Tradition was powerful and omnipresent. It was the reader's atmosphere. It was not a limitation on reading, but a way of making reading possible and relevant. Jean Gerson (1363–1429) knew that the Bible and tradition were consistent, and even Jan Hus (ca. 1370–1415) and Wycliffe read scripture with the intent, perhaps inescapable, of reading it consonant with tradition. Even Langenstein, who explicitly described a process of using empiricism (*per experientiam et discursum ex creaturis*) to understand theological truth, knew that this exploration could never be inconsistent with core traditional teachings.<sup>65</sup> Tradition bounded even empiricism.

This reliance on tradition to have access to true meaning meant the reader, ca. 1400, was less able to access, indeed was less interested in, any historical meaning of the canon. He or she needed to consonate with a long tradition of reading in order to access the deep ken; length of tradition, in a way, approximated the eternal.

Jacques Fournier (ca. 1285–1342), the Antipope Benedict XII, dates from before our period but his commentary on Isaiah 7:14 offers a good example of the relationship between tradition and philology. Fournier knew perfectly well that Isaiah's Hebrew word *almah* meant "maiden," not "virgin," but he kept the Vulgate's translation *virgo* because it was more accurate than "maiden." He knew this because it was selected by Jerome, and Jerome was a saintly doctor of the Church, who would know Isaiah's true intention. When philology and theology seemed, to us, to butt heads, theology won. This was not in any way truth bowing to tradition; it was tradition guiding us to truth.<sup>66</sup>

64 Wycliffe, *De Veritate*, ed. Buddensieg, 188–90, 202–05 (ch. 9); Matthias of Janov [Matěj z Janova], *Tractatus de Antichristo, Regulae Veteris et Novi Testamenti*, ed. Vlastimil Kybal, 3 vols. (Innsbruck: Wagner, 1911), III, 85–87. See Ocker, *Biblical Poetics*, 154–55.

65 Langenstein, *In prologum*, fol. 71vb. See Gustav Adolf Benrath, "Traditionsbewußtsein, Schriftverständnis und Schriftprinzip bei Wyclif," in *Antiqui und Moderni Traditionsbewußtsein und Fortschrittsbewußtsein im späten Mittelalter*, ed. Albert Zimmermann (New York: De Gruyter, 1974), 359–82; Mark S. Burrows, "Jean Gerson on the 'Traditional Sense' of Scripture as an Argument for an Ecclesial Hermeneutic," in *Biblical Hermeneutics in Historical Perspective*, ed. Mark S. Burrows, Paul Rorem (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1991), 152–72; Helmut Feld, *Die Anfänge der modernen biblischen Hermeneutik in der spätmittelalterlichen Theologie* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1977), 60, 69; Ocker, *Biblical Poetics*, 29, 169.

66 Ocker, *Biblical Poetics*, 165. This is more honest than the sixteenth-century theologians who philologically changed the word, but declined to change the doctrine, which they felt was good enough anyway.

## Viable Alternative 2: Human Circumstances

### Expansion of Authorship

To understand this second solution, we need to review changes in how the theologians understood causality. Aristotle (384–322 BC) divided causes into four categories and used a bronze statue as an example. The material cause was the bronze, the formal cause was the shape of the statue, the efficient cause was the sculptor or the art of making statues, and the final cause was the statue itself.<sup>67</sup>

This analytical framework was applied to the Gospel. Nicholas of Lyra taught that Jesus was the material cause of the Gospels (since he was their subject), their efficient cause (since he taught the content), and their final cause (since they brought readers to him). Lyra allowed for the human-author to have particular effects regarding the formal cause, seen, for example, in Matthew's focus on Jesus's humanity. Eymereich likewise distinguished among the Gospels, seeing a different emphasis in each, such as Matthew's humanity and John's divinity.<sup>68</sup>

By 1400, the efficient cause had taken centre stage; for a few scholars, mostly English, the other three ("metaphysical") causes had left the theatre entirely. This came with a greater sense that nature had its own necessary processes, and perhaps was therefore predictable. Once the efficient cause had grown so expansive, it was an easy step to identify an equally expansive power, God, who was omnipotent, as the efficient cause of everything. Everything that happened in the universe happened because of God.<sup>69</sup>

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67 Aristotle, *Aristotle's Physics: Books 1 & 2*, trans. William Charlton (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970), 30–31 (II.3; 195b28–196a28).

68 Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ*, 26; Hauser and Watson, *A History of Biblical Interpretation*, 269; Kevin Madigan, "Lyra on the Gospel of Matthew," in *Nicholas of Lyra: The Senses of Scripture*, ed. Philip D. W. Krey and Lesley Smith (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 195–221 (203), [https://doi.org/10.1163/97890004476653\\_015](https://doi.org/10.1163/97890004476653_015); Minnis, "Figuring," 174; Ocker, *Biblical Poetics*, 28; James Samuel Preus, *From Shadow to Promise: Old Testament Interpretation from Augustine to the Young Luther* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1969), 61–71. This is part of an older and broader interest in the *intentio auctoris*. See A. B. Kraebel, "Middle English Gospel Glosses and the Translation of Exegetical Authority," *Traditio* 69 (2014): 87–123 (100–02), <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0362152900001926>

69 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologica*, I, q. 45, arts. 3–4. On these paragraphs see Anneliese Maier, *Metaphysische Hintergründe der spätscholastischen Naturphilosophie* (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1955), 273–99; Amos Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination: From the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1986), 3–9; Ocker, *Biblical Poetics*, 127–28;



Thus, by 1400, it was well known that God was the ultimate cause, beyond the apparent mundane human causes. Previously, we had God as the author of the Bible and a sculptor as the cause of a statue. Dividing the efficient cause into the ultimate and the immediate allowed greater nuance. In the case of the statue, God emerged from behind the sculptor’s shadow to be recognized as the ultimate cause of the statue, the cause that set the sculptor in motion as an intermediary, and that used the sculptor as an instrument.

The reverse happened with Biblical authorship. God was obviously always the ultimate author of the Bible. To complete the analogy, we have to think about the more immediate authors. Theologians took into consideration the human authors—or co-authors, or ghost authors—of the Bible. God had become the ultimate efficient cause of everything, which allowed for intermediate efficient causes, like human authors and natural laws. Perhaps, in doing so, the theologians planted the seeds of their own destruction—attention to human authors accelerated the process of turning the Bible into a historical document, at least as plain-ken as deep, and thus beyond the realm of theologians.<sup>70</sup>

|                      | OBVIOUS  | SUBTLE                   |                                    | <i>historiographical frame</i>                    |
|----------------------|----------|--------------------------|------------------------------------|---|
|                      | cause    | ultimate cause           | immediate cause                    |   |
| <b>bronze statue</b> | sculptor | ..... God (increasingly) | sculptor (obviously!)              | “secularization of theology” (Funkenstein)        |
| <b>Bible</b>         | God      | God (obviously!)         | ..... human authors (increasingly) | “secularization of authorship” (Ocker and Minnis) |

Table 11.2 Two Kinds of Efficient Causality.

Before, commentators were interested in the ideas beyond the text, the deep-ken ideas that had immediate application and relevance to the commentators’ own times. When they wrote of the text’s “intention,” they looked to the soul’s ability to mine a passage for spiritual depth, and the effects of that depth on the soul. By 1400, however, scholars increased their interest in the human authors and their tendencies, particularities, and historical contexts, as well as (cue the Renaissance) the genres in which they wrote. Human authors had become the immediate efficient cause of scripture, and some of the spotlights turned

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Julie Loveland Swanstrom, “Creation as Efficient Causation in Aquinas,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 93 (2019): 1–27, <https://doi.org/10.5840/acpq20181128165>

70 Minnis, *Medieval*, 28–39, 83; Ocker, *Biblical Poetics*, 128–31, 140–41.

to them... but nobody forgot the true reality of a divine author and deep-ken truths.<sup>71</sup>

Echoing this interest in human authors, some contemporary writers themselves became more likely to sign their own works, perhaps even with the date and place of writings. Gerson did this frequently, Wycliffe rarely, Chaucer never—but it became more common through the century. Like visual artists, Bible commentators became more assertive of their own specialness in the fourteenth century (see Chapter 14). They dedicated their commentaries to important prelates and drew attention to their own names by hiding them ostentatiously in puns in their prefaces.<sup>72</sup>

### Expansion of the Literal

Over the three previous centuries this shift of authorship from God to his human ghostwriters accompanied a shift of emphasis to the literal meaning of scripture. As the efficient cause had grown to incorporate a wide range of causality, so too the literal grew and became able to serve the same functions as the old spiritual senses of scripture.<sup>73</sup>

The literal sense had, for centuries, been seen as, in some sense, fundamental. Franciscans already in twelfth century, such as Hugh and Andrew of St. Victor (d. 1175), had pursued the literal and historical meaning of scripture. This position, though rare in the Christian world, was common, as we have seen, in the *zahir* of the Muslims and the *peshat* of the Jews.<sup>74</sup>

The divine/human co-authorship described above allowed the literal sense to play theological roles once primarily assigned to spiritual senses. No fifteenth-century theologian met our modern expectation that the literal sense was precisely that intended by the human author. The literal sense was ultimately given by the divine author, which had no necessary connection with the person or historical circumstances of the human author. Nonetheless, this divine/human co-authorship began to allow some divergence of intentions, where the

71 Wycliffe, *De Veritate*, 124–29 (ch. 6), 135–36 (ch. 6), 156–58 (ch. 7), 185–90 (ch. 9), 202–05 (ch. 9). See Minnis, *Medieval*, 20–01, 49–57; Ocker, *Biblical Poetics*, 129, 141–45.

72 Hobbins, *Authorship and Publicity*, 173; Smalley, “The Bible,” 202–03.

73 Minnis, *Medieval*, 5.

74 Geoffrey Shepherd, “The English Versions of the Scriptures before Wyclif,” in *Cambridge History of the Bible*, ed. Lampe, II, 362–87 (384–85); Evans, *Language and Logic*, 47; Robert McQueen Grant, *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible* (London: SCM Press, 1984), 89; Smalley, *Study*, 83–93; Hauser and Watson, *A History of Biblical Interpretation*, 267.

literal sense was linked to the human author's intention and the spiritual senses to God's.<sup>75</sup>

In the deep ken, Jesus was *literally* in the Old Testament. Prophecy allowed Old Testament prophets to speak of the future Jesus. Influenced by Aristotle via Averroes (1126–98) and Avicenna (980–1037), Thomas Aquinas (1225–74) had already made space for this, insisting that the “literal sense is not the figure itself, but it is that which is figured,” that which is represented. Aquinas identified the primary sense (*primum sensum*) with the historical or literal one (*sensus historicus vel litteralis*).<sup>76</sup> Nicholas of Lyra listed thirty-two psalms that literally refer to Jesus, or to the Church which developed after him.<sup>77</sup> He described one psalm in which “the literal sense is about Christ; for the sense is literal which is intended by the writer before all else [*primo*].”<sup>78</sup> In a prophecy of Nathan, God declares that the future King Solomon “will be my son” (1 Chronicles 17:13). Lyra noted that its authority was literally fulfilled in Solomon and Jesus, but “less perfectly” in the former and “perfectly” in the latter.<sup>79</sup> Neither Aquinas nor Lyra were pioneers, but their great influence lets them serve as exemplars of the mainstream.

Langenstein took a similar approach. At Jn 8:56, Jesus said to the Pharisees, “Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad.” Langenstein used this verse to explain that Abraham, as a historical figure, literally knew the future and could see Jesus there: “While God simultaneously revealed it as an intellectual vision in the intellect, [Abraham] knew the future time of the New Testament through Christ.”<sup>80</sup>

None of these interpreters pursued a strictly *literal* literal meaning, but rather sought the literal meaning intended by the author—God. They did not shy away from allegorically interpreting the Old and the New Testaments. Lollards emphasized the literal sense of the Bible, but in the sense of Lyra which included author-intended allegories among the literal. Thus, they could accept allegorical readings of the Old Testament, the parables, and even the main events of the Gospels, such as the entry into Jerusalem and the three Marys at the tomb.

75 Ocker, *Biblical Poetics*, 141; Minnis, *Medieval*, 86; Evans, *Language and Logic*, 43.

76 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologica*, I, q. 1, art. 10.

77 Wilfred Werbeck, *Jacobus Perez von Valencia: Untersuchungen zu seinem Psalmenkommentar* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1959), 120–21.

78 Nicholas of Lyra, *Postilla super psalterium* (Paris: Ulrich Gering, 1483), at Ps 118 [117 here].

79 Walafrid Strabo [misattribution], *Prologus secundus de intentione auctoris*, col. 29–34, in *Opera Omnia I*, in *Patrologia Latina*, ed. Migne, CXIII, col. 32. Lyra is explicitly talking of a *duplex sensus litteralis*, which he develops out of the more ambiguous impulses of Aquinas; this became popular as Lyra became popular. See Minnis, “Authorial,” 5.

80 Langenstein, *In prologum*, fol. 98rb. Translation from Ocker, *Biblical Poetics*, 84.

Lollards also compiled some fairly traditional commentarial works on the Bible in the vernacular, with an emphasis on the literal meaning.<sup>81</sup>

This expanded literal sense brought additional attention to intentionality. By 1400, the literal sense was closely associated with the divine author's intention, but this identification was far from total. Langenstein distinguished between meanings intended by the Holy Spirit and unintended meanings—but just because a meaning was unintended did not make it false. Even allegorical interpretations wandering beyond the Holy Spirit's intent could remain true. In fact, Langenstein did not restrict this to the Bible. The fables of the Roman poet Ovid (43 BC–AD 17/18), writing a generation or two before Jesus, could be applied to Jesus, and could point to truths about Jesus, although Ovid, who was not a prophet, had no such intention: “Many fables of Ovid and others can be adapted as figures and parables to those things which Christ did. And so, as though allegorically, one explains either certain moral or true meanings to apply, which Ovid never understood when he fashioned the fables in this way.” Although such Jesus-truths extrapolated from Ovid were true, Langenstein warned of the great danger in reading Ovid this way: readers who recognize that Ovid-extrapolated Christianity was not intended by Ovid might also decide that Old Testament-extrapolated Christianity was not intended by the Old Testament prophets.<sup>82</sup>

Despite these shifts in understanding and approach, spiritual readings continued. There was constant movement from the literal sense of the words of the text to doctrinal, moral, and eschatological understandings of the implications of the text for the Church. Scholars made elaborate use of spiritual senses in preaching, which suggests that people generally took allegory as persuasive interpretation—although perhaps there was a gap between preacher and audience, or a gap between sermons and “high” theology. Allegorical interpretations were almost universally accepted for rhetorical purposes in sermons. A hostility towards too great a love for the literal continued. Some scholars simply concluded that a focus on the literal was bad because it was like Jewish law, which Jesus had made redundant.<sup>83</sup>

Allegorical readings were still used and respected even by Hussites and Lollards. Wycliffe and the Lollards took up Lyra's definition of literal, the sense

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81 BodL MS Laud Misc. 200, fol. 112v; BodL MS Rawl. C. 751, fol. 89r–94v. See Anne Hudson, “Biblical Exegesis in Wycliffite Writings,” in *John Wyclif e la tradizione degli studi biblici in Inghilterra* (Genoa: Il Melangolo, 1987), 61–79 (71–27); Hudson, *Premature*, 248, 258.

82 Langenstein, *In prologum*, fol. 139v–140r. Translation from Ocker, *Biblical Poetics*, 146–47.

83 Smalley, *Gospels*.

intended by the author;<sup>84</sup> but “literal” truth was a complicated issue for him and them. Some of his followers wrestled with Jesus’s ignoring his family in order to continue talking to his disciples, whom he called his “mother and brothers” (Mt 12:46). Taking this literally caught Jesus in a lie, as his disciples, male, could not be his mother, female. One Wycliffite denounced this “scorning” of Jesus’s words by scholars who “blabber thus for default of wit,” and recommended that they be shipped off to Oxford as punishment.<sup>85</sup>

To sum up, on the eve of the fifteenth century, Christians emphasized a deep-ken approach to scripture. Lyra believed that the Old Testament literally—intended by God—referenced the New Testament, but in an expanded literary sense. Wycliffe saw the Bible as an eternal document, entirely dissimilar to other books. Humans were the efficient cause, but God was the ultimate one.

## The Fifteenth Century

### Muslim Interpretation: Building on Plain-ken Foundations

The fifteenth century saw a continuation of the Muslim emphasis on deep-plain-ken harmony, or even on a more plain-ken approach. ‘Umar ‘Abd al-Kafi even reported a traditional chronology, actually going back to the seventh century, that re-assembled the chapters of the Qur’an into the sequence they occurred historically, rather than the usual deep-ken beautiful, order by length.<sup>86</sup> ‘Abd Allah al-Tarjuman’s (1355–1423) plain ken found the Matthew account of Herod doubtful because of human psychology: a despotic ruler would not have asked the Magi to report back Jesus’s location, but would have sent a goon to accompany them.<sup>87</sup> This chapter section surveys fifteenth-century Muslim attitudes towards scripture, looking in turn at philology, history, and comparative canon studies.<sup>88</sup>

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- 84 John Wycliffe, *Postilla super nouum testamentum*, BodL MS Bodl. 716, fol. 162r. See *Opus arduum valde*, which is 126r–216r of Brno, Moravská zemská knihovna, Mk-0000.028, fol. 168rv. See Ocker, *Biblical Poetics*, 32.
- 85 Hudson and Gradon, ed., *English Wycliffite Sermons*, I, 370; II, 280–81; Penn, “Truth,” 82–83.
- 86 ‘Umar b. Muhammad b. ‘Abd al-Kafi, *Fi ‘Adad Suwar al-Qur’an wa-Ayatihī wa-Kalimatihī*, in University of Leiden Libraries, Or. 674, fol. 13v–14r. Suyuti mentions a similar chronology, of traditional origin. See Theodor Nöldeke and Friedrich Schwally, *Geschichte des Qorāns*, 2 vols. (Leipzig: Dieterich’sche, 1909), I, 59–62.
- 87 Miguel de Epalza, *La Tuhfa, autobiografía y polémica islámica contra el cristianismo de Abdallah al-Taryuman (fray Anselmo Turmeda)* (Rome: Accademia nazionale dei Lincei, 1971), 280–83.
- 88 Kenneth Edward Nolin, “The Itqān and its Sources: A Study of *al-Itqān fī ‘ulūm al-Qur’ān* by Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūfī with special reference to *al-Burhān fī ‘ulūm*

## Philology

As our period began, the traditional philological work continued. In particular, scholars became interested in resolving issues in the Qur'an by identifying words as coming from languages other than Arabic. Al-Suyuti wrote two books on foreign words in the Qur'an. One listed 108 words with origins in 11 languages. Zakariyya al-Ansari (d. 1520) and al-Suyuti both took Coptic as a language essentially different from Arabic, one lending itself to falsehood, but useful as a historical explanation. For example, in 19:24, as Mary was in labour, God "called her from below her, 'Do not grieve...'" Exegetes struggled with the meaning of "from below her," which some identified as a Coptic-language "from within her" that the Arabic had taken up. Mary's "flight" into Egypt endorsed an Egyptian language's appearance in this context.<sup>89</sup>

At the same time, we see a philological interest in seeking out early Qur'anic manuscripts. Ibn al-Jazari (1350–1429), born in Damascus, travelled as a teenager to Egypt and collected manuscripts testifying to multiple readings of the Qur'an. He was immensely influential as a scholar; he travelled with Sultan Bayezid I (ca. 1360–1403) to Nicopolis, was later captured and deported by Timur (1336–1405), and died in Shiraz in 1429.<sup>90</sup>

The most prominent philologist of our period was al-Suyuti.<sup>91</sup> Al-Suyuti paid attention to tradition, to how the Qur'an was collected and transmitted. Al-Suyuti had guidelines, called "canons," for distinguishing among readings, and among textual variants. The main concern, by far, was the existence of attestation (*isnad*) and transmission. To this end, he investigated the *isnad* to evaluate their certainty. Lest we mistake him for a "modern" philologist, he discussed a dubious hadith with Muhammad directly. He had himself consulted Muhammad over seventy times while awake.<sup>92</sup>

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*al-Qur'ān* by Badr al-Dīn al-Zarkashī" (PhD thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 1968); E. Geoffroy, "al-Suyūṭī," in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, ed. Bearman et al., IX, 913–16; E. Geoffroy, "Zakariyyā," in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, ed. Bearman et al., XI, 406; Wiebke Walther, "Zāhir," in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, ed. Bearman et al., XI, 387–88; Rippin, "Construction," 173–98.

89 Rippin, "Designation," 437–42.

90 Anna M. Gade, "Recitation," in *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'ān*, ed. Rippin, 481–93 (484); Aziz Suryal Atiya, *The Crusade of Nicopolis* (New York: AMS, 1978), 150, 202.

91 See al-Suyuti, *La révélation du coran selon al-Suyt: traduction annotée du chapitre seizième de Ġalāl al-Dn al-Suyūt, al Itān f'ulūm al-Qur'ān*, trans. Jean-Marc Balhan (Rome: Pontificio istituto di studi arabi e d'islamistica, 2001); Elizabeth Mary Sartain, *Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1975); al-Suyuti, *The Perfect Guide to the Sciences of the Qur'an*, trans. Hamid Algar (Reading: Garnet, 2011).

92 Geoffroy, "al-Suyūṭī," 915.

Even looking at the number and variety of technical terms al-Suyuti used in his investigations suggests how developed philology had become. *Qira'ah* studied how one could vocalize the consonant skeleton in ways to change its meaning. *Ishtiqaq* looked to how the etymology of a word informed a verse's meaning.<sup>93</sup> Al-Suyuti could easily park obscure verses in the *mutashabih* category, verses of dubious meaning.

Still, al-Suyuti balanced his plain-ken philology with a deep-ken recognition of hidden meaning. He held that accusations of inconsistency or contradiction in the Qur'an were false, ill-intended attacks on its dignity. He used medieval strategies to explain away these apparent inconsistencies as forms of rhetoric. Al-Suyuti talked of "signs" or "concealed allusions" bridging the gap between the literal text and the inner meaning. The difficult non-literal language of the Qur'an was acknowledged and thus justified by the Qur'an itself, as at 29:43 ("And these examples We present to the people, but none will understand them except those of knowledge"). Quoting Jesus, al-Suyuti cited parallels in the Gospel, as at Mt 13:13 ("This is why I speak to them in parables: 'Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand'").<sup>94</sup>

At times, al-Suyuti's explanations were more plain ken, based on the particularities of human and of language. Some scholars suggested that there might be mistakes in the Qur'an, perhaps due to slips of the pen, or perhaps ungrammatical usage of words. Al-Suyuti insisted that neither was possible. To support this, he mustered evidence gleaned from the tradition and the hadith. The companions of the Prophet were eloquent, and they took care to keep out error as the Qur'an was being preserved. Aisha (ca. 613–78), Abu Bakr (573–634), Uthman (ca. 573–656), and others memorized the Qur'an, and wrote it down—sometimes even in the presence of the Prophet. Apparent errors were not in the Qur'an itself but were odd spellings or variant readings.<sup>95</sup>

### History

For many scholars, a problem arose when the kens collided in the contradiction between the deep-ken Qur'an and its revelation in plain-ken history. The Qur'an stipulated that all its parts had not been revealed simultaneously, but had been "spaced distinctly" so that "We may strengthen thereby your heart" (25:32). Al-Suyuti recalled a tradition that explains bit-by-bit revelation as "considerate

93 Burge, "Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti," 288.

94 Al-Suyuti, *Le parfait manuel*, 828 (52). See Wansbrough, *Qur'anic Studies*, 165, 242–44.

95 Wansbrough, *Qur'anic Studies*, 221.

for the one to whom it is sent." Still, Qur'an scholars were often uncomfortable with its piecemeal revelation, which apparently lacked the power of deepened beauty. Mostly they concluded that this was a skillful means, that the awesomeness of Muhammad and the Arabs encouraged God to communicate the Qur'an in the way that best facilitated its comprehension.<sup>96</sup>

Let us examine how al-Suyuti himself negotiated this. Drawing on its own contents as well as outside hadith sources, al-Suyuti explained that the Qur'an descended—in one piece, at one time—from the preserved tablet to the lowest heaven. At 97:1 the Qur'an acknowledges, "Indeed, We sent it down during the Night of Power." Al-Suyuti shifted the referent of "it" from Gabriel to the Qur'an itself. Gabriel had revealed it, piecewise, to the Prophet from 610 until his death, in serial bursts of some five verses each. As 20:114 advised, "do not hasten with [recitation of] the Qur'an before its revelation is completed to you." Only then did the pristine Prophet transmit the Qur'an to his followers. Thus, the eternal revelation descended once, and was then revealed serially in time. This harmonized Qur'anic assertions of single utterance with the specifications of different times of revelation. Al-Suyuti also distinguished between eternal laws, many of which have never been revealed, and those bound by history, which come into effect only upon their revelation.<sup>97</sup>

Al-Suyuti contrasted this process to the non-serial Gospels—which, like the Qur'an, had been revealed during Ramadan—and indeed to the Torah before them, citing Qur'an 3:3 as evidence. There was a long tradition in Muslim interpretation holding that giving the revelation in one piece to the Jews did not work out well for God, who had to force them to accept it. God was improving the process of revelation by making it happen over a duration of time.<sup>98</sup>

The relationship between Jesus and the Qur'an created a specific challenge that al-Suyuti explored with both kens. It was known that Jesus would judge all humans at the end of time, but Jesus had gone to heaven centuries before the Qur'anic revelation. Was it a problem that the judge would be unfamiliar with the law? Initially, al-Suyuti denied the assumption of the question. To the deep ken, the essence of the Qur'an was, more or less, the same as the essence of the Gospels, and they all necessarily consonated at their cores. His ultimate solution, however, was plain ken: since Jesus never died—and indeed was the

96 Al-Suyuti, *Le parfait manuel*, 166 (16); Shnizer, "Sacrality and Collection," 164.

97 Al-Suyuti, *Le parfait manuel*, 143–47 (10–11); 161–91 (16), 669 (42), 1058–59 (62).

See Herbert Berg, "Context: Muḥammad," in *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'ān*, ed. Rippin, 187–204 (188); Wansbrough, *Qur'anic Studies*, 36–37, 176.

98 Al-Suyuti, *Le parfait manuel*, 165 (16), 194–97 (17), 686 (42), 750 (44), 1066 (62); 1074 (63); Shnizer, "Sacrality and Collection," 164; Wansbrough, *Qur'anic Studies*, 36–37.



last of the Companions of the Prophet—he had opportunities to study the law with Muhammad during the latter’s life on earth (hadith testify that the two prophets had met), and later had an opportunity to study the law with Muhammad in heaven.<sup>99</sup>

That the eternal Qur’an could be the result of, and take place within, a historical process created a space for two especially plain-ken tools of interpretation, abrogation and contextualization.<sup>100</sup>

Works on abrogation became less used in our period, as theologians found other ways to reconcile apparent contradictions. Indeed, al-Suyuti reduced the once-long list of abrogated verses to only twenty. A famous case of possible abrogation was the so-called “Satanic Verses.” A long-established, but controversial, tradition held that Satan had slipped verses in support of polytheism into the Qur’an, for 22:52 and 53:19 suggested that Muhammad recognized three local Arabian goddesses. 22:52 revealed that they had been included through the efforts of Satan in the earlier, now abrogated, revelation. This was accepted by Jalal al-Din al-Mahalli (1389–1459) but denied by Ibn Kathir.<sup>101</sup>

In contrast, contextualization (“occasions of revelation,” *asbab al-nuzul*) continued as a major interpretive strategy. Al-Suyuti improved on—in fact, historicized—this approach by looking beyond the presence of specific “it was revealed” wording to include any information that established a direct link to the historical circumstances of the Prophet. He noted that the context of a revelation might or might not be relevant. Depending on context, a revelation could be intended for a certain specific circumstance or could be meant to be generally binding. Potentially, the revelation’s context could be critically important, modifying the true meaning of the revelation, and making that meaning immediate and understandable. Repetition of the same revelation within the Qur’an was explained by the possibility of a revelation having multiple relevant contexts; each context could thus generate a unique utterance. Al-Suyuti divided surahs between Mecca and Medina in a way so skillful as to still be in use today.<sup>102</sup>

Al-Suyuti understood that the Qur’an existed within a wider historical space. He argued that not all of the Qur’an was necessarily direct speech from

99 Fritz Meier, “A Resurrection of Muhammad in Suyūṭī,” in *Essays on Islamic Piety and Mysticism*, ed. Fritz Meier (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 505–47 (539).

100 Jane Dammen McAuliffe, “An Introduction to Medieval Interpretation of the Quran,” in *With Reverence for the Word*, ed. McAuliffe, Walfish, and Goering, 311–19 (316).

101 Shahab Ahmed, “Satanic Verses,” in *Encyclopedia of the Qur’an*, ed. McAuliffe, IV, 531–35; Powers, “Exegetical Genre,” 20–23, 118; Rippin, “Exegetical,” 219.

102 Burge, “Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti,” 283–84; Rippin, “Construction,” 197; Wansbrough, *Qur’anic Studies*, 126, 177.

God. Both 6:104 and 6:114 were Muhammad's voice, 19:64 was Gabriel's ("And we [angels] descend not except by the order of your Lord. To Him belongs that before us and that behind us and what is in between. And never is your Lord forgetful"), and, in 37:164, the angels said, "There is not among us any except that he has a known position." All this al-Suyuti inferred from context, despite the lack of explicit attributions in the Qur'an.<sup>103</sup> Similarly, with a plain ken on history, al-Suyuti suggested that the Qur'an was not comprehensive towards the prophets collectively. Of the 124,000 prophets counted by al-Baydawi in the thirteenth century, al-Suyuti contemplated the many thousands unmentioned, perhaps because their personal circumstances were too modest to make it into the canon, as for example a prophet who was an Ethiopian slave.<sup>104</sup>

Al-Suyuti had a particular interest in the historical circumstances of the seventh century, when the Qur'an was revealed. He provided a historical reason for the choice of Qurayshi Arabic as the language of the Qur'an: since the Quraysh were resident in Mecca, which saw the most diversity of dialects given its commerce and travellers, they were able to construct an idealized Arabic with the best of each dialect. Thus, Qurayshi Arabic was the most able to communicate effectively.<sup>105</sup> When working on lexicography, al-Suyuti restricted what could be known to what had been known at the time, historically, by the Prophet's Companions.<sup>106</sup>

Ultimately, al-Suyuti's Qur'an recognized the human diversity in the reception of the canon. Al-Suyuti expanded the category of direct revelation beyond the Qur'an, to include God's intention, as perceived by humans. He argued that, because multiple readings of the Qur'an were acceptable, and multiple readings created multiple interpretations, then exegesis must make room for multiple understandings.<sup>107</sup>

103 Quoted by Hanadi Dayyeh, "The Relation between Frequency of Usage and Deletion in Sībawayhi's Kitāb," in *The Foundations of Arabic Linguistics: Sībawayhi and Early Arabic*, ed. Amal Elesha Marogy (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 75–98 (81), [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004229655\\_005](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004229655_005); Wansbrough, *Qur'anic Studies*, 14.

104 Uri Rubin, "Prophets and Prophethood," in *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'ān*, ed. Rippin, 234–47 (235).

105 Wansbrough, *Qur'anic Studies*, 94, 104, citing al-Suyuti's المزهرة في علوم اللغة العربية [The Luminous Work Concerning the Sciences of Language and its Subfields]. For this issue in the earlier Muslim tradition see Paul E. Kahle, "The Arabic Readers of the Koran," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 8 (1949): 65–71, <https://doi.org/10.1086/370914>

106 Al-Suyuti, *Le parfait manuel*, 267–91 (22–27). See Wansbrough, *Qur'anic Studies*, 217.

107 Al-Suyuti, *Le parfait manuel*, 105–06 (5), 109–10 (7), 172–74 (16). See Shabir Ally, "The Culmination of Tradition-based Tafsīr: The Qur'ān Exegesis al-Durr al-manthūr of al-Suyūfī (d. 911/1505)" (PhD thesis, University of Toronto, 2012), 7–10, 316–24; Wansbrough, *Qur'anic Studies*, 35–36, 59.

*Comparative Canon Studies*

The medieval period's arguments drawing from the comparative study of canons endured into and thrived during our period.

Ibn Khaldun wrote of a Qur'anic Jesus that drew on the historical context provided by the Gospel. In particular, Jesus "abolished some of the laws of the Torah" and "performed marvellous wonders, such as healing the insane and reviving the dead." Because of their jealousy of his success, the Jews petitioned emperor Augustus for permission to kill Jesus. Ibn Khaldun's historical sense increased as he sketched the history of the Christian canon and its human authors. Matthew wrote his Gospel in Hebrew, in Jerusalem; later, John, the son of Zebedee, translated it into Latin in Rome. Luke wrote his originally in Latin, as his intended audience was a Roman official. Peter wrote his in Latin and assigned its authorship to his student Mark, whose name that Gospel bears. Ibn Khaldun noted that the four Gospels were not purely revelation, but had the words of the apostles interwoven with the actual words of Jesus. Paying attention to genre, he concluded that the Gospels focused on "sermons and stories," and, relative to the Qur'an, were less concerned with law-giving.<sup>108</sup>

The main innovation of the fifteenth century came in the use of reliable Arabic translations of the other canons. Even as Arabic translations of the Christian Gospels became more available, many scholars had continued to ignore them, relying instead on anti-infidel summaries or completely fabricated verses. Finally, Ibrahim ibn 'Umar al-Biqā'i (1407–80) did something extraordinary: rather than rely on hearsay, he himself read an Arabic translation of the Bible. This was disconcerting enough to encourage al-Biqā'i to write an apology for this approach. His method paid off, as it allowed him to compare precisely and accurately the Qur'anic narratives with their counterpart in the Hebrew Bible and the Gospels, envisioning the Qur'an as last in a historical sequence of canons. He quoted specific passages to make the comparisons more precise. He also compared the two non-Islamic canons with each other, citing in one instance the same passage in New Testament and Hebrew Bible variations. Al-Biqā'i's candid criticism of other scholars had earned him few friends, and when colleagues saw him using the Hebrew canon, and in some cases considering it more authoritative than Islamic tradition, they piled on attacks against him. They should have bitten their tongues. He won debates against them and obtained fatwas blessing his unorthodox approach. Although al-Biqā'i disagreed with the

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108 Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, trans. Franz Rosenthal, 3 vols. (New York: Pantheon, 1958), I, 476–78 (ch. 3, sec. 31). Note that Ibn Khaldun's New Testament canon differed from the Christians', as he included, for example, the Letter of Clement.

Christians' ideas of Jesus, he made constructive use of the Gospels to poke holes in their Christology. Jesus was the son of God only in a metaphorical sense. He composed his own new diatessaron, in which references to Jesus as the son of God (at Mt 8:29, Lk 6:35, Jn 1:34, 1:49, Jn 5:31–47) disappeared or morphed into orthodoxy, and he omitted the account of Satan's temptation of Jesus.<sup>109</sup>

### Christian Interpretation: Inching towards the Plain Ken

Fifteenth-century Christian exegetes did sometimes bring the plain ken to bear on their canon. John Whethamstede (d. 1465), an abbot of St. Albans, took a plain-ken approach to the comprehensiveness of canon: we cannot assume that the Bible includes every important event. The Gospels' not mentioning an event from Jesus's life does not prove that it never happened. History is bigger than the world described by the canon. Augustine reasonably hints that Jesus resurrected more people than the Gospels record, and Jerome describes the sudden destruction of local idols when the infant Jesus arrived in Egypt—even though the Gospels remain silent on events during his time in the south.<sup>110</sup> This is an unusually non-modern use of the plain ken: most historians today would so keenly feel the centuries between Jesus and Jerome as to entirely discount the latter as historically authoritative.

### *Triumph of the Literal*

The weight of innovation in Christian interpretation concerned not the comprehensiveness of the canon, but emphasis on its literal meaning. The fifteenth century saw a growing consensus that the literal sense of scripture was safer, more closely associated with revelation, more verifiable, and more precisely intended by the human author.

By 1400, the literal sense had pushed the others largely off the stage, but the old spiritual senses found ways to survive. Few preachers could resist imaginative allegorical reads in their sermons. As theologians became more interested in the nature of language itself, they found in the literal a space for

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109 Walid A. Saleh, ed., *In Defense of the Bible: A Critical Edition and an Introduction to al-Biqā'ī's Bible Treatise* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), <https://doi.org/10.1163/ej.9789004168572.i-224>. See Lazarus-Yafeh, "The Sanctity," 125–29; Walid A. Saleh and Kevin Casey, "An Islamic Diatessaron: Al-Biqā'ī's Harmony of the Four Gospels," in *Translating the Bible into Arabic: Historical, Text Critical and Literary Aspects*, ed. Sara Binay and Stefan Leder (Beirut: Orient-Institut, 2012), 85–115, <https://doi.org/10.5771/9783956505041-85>

110 BL Cotton MS Nero C VI, fol. 58rv.

multiple literal meanings. A text might bear literally non-literal meanings, for the literal sense had expanded its capacity to explain even non-literal speech. Figurative language could be considered a kind of literal language. This was not a simple change in terminology; the old “allegorical” did not simply become renamed “literal figurative.” “Literal” located the meaning within the text, not allegorically beyond it.<sup>111</sup>

To read a text literally gained authority because it was the understanding most closely tied to revelation. Gerson wrote that Jesus revealed the literal sense of scripture, which was subsequently confirmed by martyrdoms and miracles. The literal sense was also considered safer. Where theologians had once admitted that certain Old Testament passages had *no* literal meaning—they needed rather to be interpreted spiritually, as their surface literal meaning was unacceptable—Denis the Carthusian (1402–71) held that “every passage of holy scripture has a literal meaning.” To get it, one sometimes has to look beyond “what is first signified by the literal words” to find meaning instead in “what is designated through the thing that is signified by the literal words”—that is, the author’s intended meaning.<sup>112</sup> Even the most obscure and strange passages could thus be understood literally. Gerson explained that the literal sense is “not only grammatical, nor strictly logical, but is the one which the holy spirit principally intended.”<sup>113</sup> Within that literal sense he, like Nicholas of Lyra, could think in terms of a double literal sense, secondly in terms of the prophets’ own realities, and firstly in terms of the Jesus reality to come. Gerson explained that “one is called the interior sense, the other the external; one the superficial, and the other the marrow.”<sup>114</sup>

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111 Evans, *Language and Logic*, 40–49; Ocker, *Biblical Poetics*, 15–21.

112 Denis the Carthusian, *Enarratio in librum Job*, in *Opera Omnia*, IV, 362–63.

113 Jean Gerson, “De examinatione doctrinarum,” in OC, IX, 463; Gerson, “Réponse à la consultation des maîtres,” in OC, X, 239–41. Gerson uses the same “ille quem spiritus [...] intendebat” language in “Quae veritates sint de necessitate salutis credendae,” in OC, VI, 185. See Fritz Hahn, “Zur Hermeneutik Gersons,” *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 51 (1954): 34–50; Ian Christopher Levy, “Holy Scripture and the Quest for Authority among Three Late Medieval Masters,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 61 (2010): 40–68, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022046909991436>

114 Jean Gerson, “Allegationes, seu Sententiae LXI Magistrorum in Concilio Constantiensi circa Propositiones Joannis Parvi,” in *Opera Omnia*, ed. Lud. Ellies du Pin (Hague: de Hondt, 1728), col. 900. See Evans, *Language and Logic*, 42; D. Zach Flanagan, “Making Sense of It All: Gerson’s Biblical Theology,” in *A Companion to Jean Gerson*, ed. Brian Patrick McGuire (Brill: Leiden, 2006), 133–77 (154–59), [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047409076\\_005](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047409076_005); Hauser and Watson, *A History of Biblical Interpretation*, 266–67; Heiko Oberman, *Forerunners of the Reformation: The Shape of Late Medieval Thought* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1967), 288–89; Ocker, *Biblical Poetics*, 22, 31.

Jacobus Perez of Valencia (ca. 1408–1490), an Augustinian Hermit exegete, similarly described the Jesus interpretation of the Old Testament as simultaneously allegorical and literal. An “allegorical” explanation of a psalm in terms of Jesus, he “would even more precisely call literal.” Another psalm was to be explained “not only literally, but principally allegorically and literally” in terms of Jesus.<sup>115</sup> Hus argued that *all* the psalms refer to Jesus. For example, Ps 111:4 (“He has caused his wonderful works to be remembered”) refers, he asserted, to the Eucharist.<sup>116</sup>

Denis worked in a similar way: when Jacob blessed his son (“You are a lion’s cub, Judah,” Genesis 49:9), the lion literally referred to Judah, and to David, and to Jesus. Many Old Testament passages describe a vine. This literally referred to (*designatur ad litteram*) Jesus, as well as to the Synagogue and the Church. Denis knew that Abraham bound his son Isaac for sacrifice in response to God’s instruction, but he also knew that Abraham bound Isaac as a symbolic prefiguring of Jesus’s Crucifixion. Indeed, the connections went in both directions, for Denis also linked Jesus’s statement (Jn 21:18) that “someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go” to Abraham’s dressing Isaac and leading him to sacrifice.<sup>117</sup>

Girolamo Savonarola (1452–98) also identified the literal meaning with the author’s intention. As an example, he considered Lk 1:51 (“He has performed mighty deeds with his arm...”) and specified that the literal meaning was not that God performed mighty deeds with his arm, but rather that God was a powerful actor. Moreover, while verbal expressions naturally carried meaning, God used events to carry meaning. He could engineer history, and thus “ordain things in their course that such a meaning can be derived from them.” Savonarola was interested in history (plain ken) but fundamentally understood that history to be infused with meaning (deep ken).<sup>118</sup>

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115 Jacobus Perez de Valentia, *Centum ac quinquaginta psalmi Davidici* (Paris: n.p., 1509), fol. 217r (Psalm 101:8), fol. 230r (Psalm 105:5–11). See Werbeck, *Jacobus Perez von Valencia*, 123–34.

116 Jan Hus, *Historiae et monumentorum Joannis Hus atque Hieronymi Pragensis, confessorum Christi*, 2 vols. (Nuremberg: Joannis Montani et Ulrici Neuberi, 1715), II, 387–88.

117 Denis the Carthusian, *Enarratio in Genesim*, in *Opera Omnia*, I, 289, 444. See Hauser and Watson, *A History of Biblical Interpretation*, 267; Ocker, *Biblical Poetics*, 22–23, 85.

118 Savonarola, *On the Advantages and Disadvantages of the Poetical Method to Christian Souls*, trans. J. W. Binns, in Binns, “Late Medieval Poetics: The Case of Girolamo Savonarola,” in *Estudios de literatura, pensamiento, historia política y cultura en la Edad Media europea*, ed. Manuel J. Peláez (Barcelona: Universidad de Málaga, 1991), 307–39 (330–31). See Alastair J. Minnis, “Fifteenth-Century Versions of Thomistic Literalism: Girolamo Savonarola and Alfonso de Madrigal,” *Neue Richtungen*

For the Spanish secular Alfonso de Madrigal, “El Tostado” (ca. 1410–55), the literal sense was historical: it was the “nude history,” that is, what the canon “directly” (*immediate*) expressed, without the mediation of clothes. One could find safety in this literal sense because it was fixed and could not be changed to please us. One could, therefore, talk about it in terms of proofs and fulfillment. Consider his treatment of 1 Chronicles 22:10: “He is the one who will build a house for my Name. He will be my son, and I will be his father. And I will establish the throne of his kingdom over Israel forever.” Literally, in the Old Testament context, “son” referred to Solomon. However, in the New Testament, Hebrews 1:5 took “son” as a reference to Jesus—a fulfillment that only works as a proof if the original reference was literal. Therefore, the Chronicles verse must have two literal meanings, not just Solomon but Jesus as well.<sup>119</sup> In contrast, there were no literal references to Jesus in Virgil (70–21 BC), because he had no intention to refer to Jesus.<sup>120</sup>

This is one of several types of approaches to the idea of a double literal sense. For Hus, it was the consonant collaboration of divine and human authors that leads to the multiple literal meanings. The Council of Constance (1414–18) also saw favourable discussion of a *duplex sensus litteralis* [twofold literal sense], one being “mere grammatical sense” and the other the “‘true’ inner literal sense.”<sup>121</sup>

### *Trial of the Literal*

The stakes for literal-sense issues could be high. Paul’s assertion that “the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2 Corinthians 3:6) resonated through the centuries, interpreted and amplified by Augustine, who warned that a literal reading of what was intended figuratively was the “death of the soul,” for that subordinates the intellect to the flesh, in the way of non-human animals.<sup>122</sup> Thus it had become something of a maxim: to always hold the literal sense in sacred scripture was to kill one’s soul.

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*in der hoch- und spätmittelalterlichen Biblexegese* 32 (2016): 163–80, <https://doi.org/10.1524/9783486595789-012>

119 Alfonso Tostado, “Commentaria in Matthaei,” in Tostado, *Opera Omnia*, 12 vols. (Cologne: Gymnicus and Heiratus, 1613), X, part 2, 85–86. Lyra used this same verse. In our discussion of Lyra, we referred to his treatment of a similar verse, 1 Chronicles 17:13.

120 Alfonso Tostado, “In Epistolam D. Hieronymi Ad Paulinum Commentarii,” in *Opera Omnia*, I, 30. See Minnis, “Fifteenth-Century,” 163–80.

121 Rita Copeland, *Pedagogy, Intellectuals, and Dissent in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2001), 110; Ocker, *Biblical Poetics*, 146.

122 Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, ed. Timothy George (Nashville: B and H, 2022), 88 (3.5.9).

More, or less, was at stake than soteriology. In the course of the French political crisis, the Duke of Orléans was assassinated in 1407 on orders of Duke John of Burgundy (1371–1419), and Jean Petit (ca. 1360–1411) was assigned to defend the murder. He appealed to the concept of equity, an old idea from Aristotle (ἐπιείκεια) that referred to “a correction of the law where it is defective owing to its universality.”<sup>123</sup> That is, while “thou shalt not kill” was always a law, in these particular circumstances it failed to be valid. To drive this point home, Petit argued against taking the commandment literally. He thus invoked 2 Corinthians 3:6: “the letter kills, but charity makes alive.”<sup>124</sup> Charity dictated that we not cling heartlessly to the literal senses, and a prohibition on murder should not always be taken literally. Gerson condemned this logic, and Duke John appealed Gerson’s decision to the pope.

In the end, the Council of Constance took up the matter: could the literal meaning ever be insufficient? At Constance, the supporters of the murder, the Burgundy/Petit faction, had to show that the literal did not always work. They pointed to examples of obviously figurative language, asserting, for example, that Jesus did not literally come to earth to bring a sword (Mt 10:34). Following Duns Scotus, they argued that context could help sort the figurative from the literal. In the other direction, Jn 15:1’s “I am the vine” could have been meant literally—perhaps odd to think that Jesus was literally a vine, but no more odd than transubstantiation. However, the verse’s completion said to Jesus’s disciples, “you are the branches.” The impossibility of disciples literally being branches proved that Jesus was not literally a vine, although he could have been. Following Nicholas of Lyra, the theologians for the defence argued that some Old Testament commandments might have been literally true in that period, but in the course of history had become figurative. Finally, to avoid denying the literal sense of scripture, they appealed to the idea of a double literal sense. The higher of the two literal meanings was true, and we should not cling to the lower literal meaning; that is, the author’s intent was true, but we should not depend on the particular words employed to express it.<sup>125</sup>

On the other side, Gerson and the critics of the murder held that the literal sense was always true. They admitted that it was wise to be careful

123 Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. David Ross (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009), 99 (V.10 1137b.27).

124 Enguerrand de Monstrelet, *Chroniques d’Enguerrand de Monstrelet*, ed. J. A. Buchon, 12 vols. (Paris: Verdière, 1826), I, 285.

125 Gerson, “Allegationes,” in *Opera Omnia*, col. 805, 810, 891. See Karlfried Froehlich, “‘Always to Keep the Literal Sense in Holy Scripture Means to Kill One’s Soul’: The State of Biblical Hermeneutics at the Beginning of the Fifteenth Century,” in *Literary Uses of Typology from the Late Middle Ages to the Present*, ed. E. Miner (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), 20–48 (27–29, 35–37).



about clinging too tightly to the particular words of the literal sense, but their opponents' mistrust of words was so totalizing, they protested, that any word could be interpreted to have any meaning, even meanings that were ungenueine or blasphemous—as Jean Petit himself did in justifying this murder. Allowing this eroded the power of the Bible, for, Gerson noted, Jesus said in Mt 5:18 that “not an iota... will pass from the law.” Paul in 2 Corinthians 3:6 was saying that the *letter* kills—not the literal sense, but the bare words themselves. Gerson's team admitted that the bare words could not be taken at face value: that would mean a verse like Lk 9:62 (“No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of heaven”) would absurdly and unfairly introduce a deadly professional hazard into the work of farmers. One still needed to find the figurative-literal meaning, by taking into account tradition, rhetoric, and context.<sup>126</sup>

The two sides were not so far apart: one was making a distinction between a higher and lower literal sense, the other between a verbal meaning and an actual meaning within the literal sense. Still, the Duke of Orléans died in the narrow gap between the two.

The verdict went in Burgundy's favour. At Constance, fifty-one agreed with the plain-ken view that the literal was not necessarily sufficient, defeating the twenty-four voices in opposition.<sup>127</sup> Particular exceptions could exist, and its literal truth could degrade over time.

### *Rhetoric of the Literal*

Any scholar trying to understand the literal meaning of canon implicitly answered the fundamental question: was scripture exceptional, or could it be treated like any other work of literature? While the fifteenth century consistently appreciated its uniqueness, in the seventeenth century, mainstream scholars began to accept that the Bible was not exceptional—the great revolution in the study of scripture. The first steps towards that revolution occurred in our period, for some of our scholars took the study of rhetoric in classical literature and applied it to the Bible. Renaissance scholars were interested in ancient rhetoric, and thus more attuned to figures of speech (which could all be safely found in the literal sense), to questions of the subject of a text, and to the nature of the arguments (enthymeme, syllogism) being made. Such criticism of narratives of scripture were common in the ancient world (as in Porphyry, Julian, and Celsus), and thus the recovery of classics led to a more critical attitude towards the Bible.

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<sup>126</sup> Gerson, “Allegationes,” in *Opera Omnia*, col. 928, 945, 967.

<sup>127</sup> Froehlich, “Always to Keep the Literal Sense,” 27–29, 37–48.

With the rising Renaissance interest in classical rhetoric, readers became more attentive to the texts themselves, and more optimistic that, through texts, readers could connect with writers and know the literal sense of the words. With some hesitation and debate, this approach could be applied even to the Bible, which previously had been more about the eternal truths beyond the text. Gerson extolled the power of rhetoric to reach the meaning of the obscure language of scripture in a way old-fashioned logic could not. "The literal meaning of Sacred Scripture must be understood not according to logical or dialectical force," he urged, "but rather by the expressions usual in rhetorical sermons and by tropes and figurative expressions which common use carries on, with consideration of the literal circumstances from what comes before and after." For Gerson, the Bible "has—like moral and historical knowledge—its own logic, which we call rhetoric." Rhetoric taught the recognition of figures of speech. This, in itself, was a tremendous step towards thinking of the Bible as similar to other kinds of literature, that could or must be read as such—but exclusivism remained dominant.<sup>128</sup>

Savonarola objected vehemently to this treating of canon as poetry.<sup>129</sup> Scripture, to have a spiritual sense, must rest on a historical foundation while reaching meaningfully towards some event, foreseen and foreordained as the intended meaning. Canon required metaphor to be meaningful. In contrast, with poetry, metaphor was purely superfluous, a cheap form of mundane "delight." Poetry was "puerile," sleazy, and toxic; "we sacrifice to demons [...] by too freely listening to their words." Here, Tostado echoed Savonarola, with stronger language: poetry was merely an "ugly woman wearing others' makeup." Savonarola further associated poetry with what we would call the plain ken. It was about particularities, none of which have a deep-ken consonance with a generalization beyond their diversity of details.<sup>130</sup>

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128 Jean Gerson, "De sensu litterali Sacrae Scripturae," in OC, III, 334. See Ocker, *Biblical Poetics*, 110–11, 165–66; Peter Harrison, *The Bible, Protestantism and the Rise of Natural Science* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1998), 266–69; Michael H. Shank, *Unless You Believe, You Shall Not Understand: Logic, University, and Society in Late Medieval Vienna* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1988), 111–38.

129 Here, I draw especially from his "Opus perutile de divisione ordine ac utilitate omnium scientiarum" (1491).

130 Savonarola, *On the Advantages*, 321–23; Tostado, "Commentaria," 88. See Ralf Georg Czapla, *Das Biblepos in der Frühen Neuzeit: Zur deutschen Geschichte einer europäischen Gattung* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), 240–50, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110263770>

## Christian Interpretation: Historicizing Manuscripts

1400 saw readers approaching the Bible with greater caution, but little of this was philological. Gerson probably never consulted multiple manuscript sources of a text, let alone puzzled out guidelines on which, of conflicting manuscripts, to prefer. The old principles devised by Augustine and Roger Bacon prevailed unquestioned: that older was more authoritative than newer, that a variation found in many manuscripts trumped a variation found in few. Christian manuscript philology developed only once the theology and philosophy created a space for it.<sup>131</sup>

These ventures would inaugurate a new era of studying Greek in the Far West. In 1397, Manuel Chrysoloras (ca. 1350–1415) moved to Florence and began the first regular instruction in Greek in Renaissance Italy. Of course, Greek had continued to be used in the Byzantine Empire, and so the Near West saw no giant linguistic gap between the read text and the original text—and no giant productive shock when that gap was overcome. John of Ragusa (Ivan Stojković, d. 1443), who had fought against the Hussites at Basel, had been sent by that Basel Council to Constantinople, whence he returned with four dozen Greek manuscripts.<sup>132</sup>

Alongside Greek studies, with the Renaissance we find a more sustained and enthusiastic embrace of philology. Coluccio Salutati (1331–1406), Chancellor of Florence, encouraged the collection of texts for comparative purposes. In 1428, Giovanni Lamola (d. 1450), working on an old and error-riddled codex of Cicero (106–43 BC), found value in those errors: “Better to rave with that old one than to know with those careful ones.” Still, there was little systemization: Renaissance editors did not identify their manuscript sources nor identify what were their own conjectures.<sup>133</sup>

131 Evans, *Language and Logic*, 71; Hobbins, *Authorship and Publicity*, 29, 49.

132 Peter Burke, *The Renaissance Sense of the Past* (New York: St. Martin, 1970); Anthony Grafton, *Defenders of the Text: The Traditions of Scholarship in an Age of Science* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1991), 1–103; Donald R. Kelly, *Foundations of Modern Historical Scholarship: Language, Law and History in the French Renaissance* (New York: Columbia UP, 1970); A. Cataldi Palau, “Jean Stojković de Raguse (†1443): L’influence des ses manuscrits dans la diffusion de la culture byzantine en Suisse et en Allemagne,” *Annuaire de l’Université de Sofia “St. Kliment Ohridski”: Centre de recherches slavo-byzantines “Ivan Dujčev”* 96 (2011): 93–132; Ian Thomson, “Manuel Chrysoloras and the Early Italian Renaissance,” *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 7 (1966): 63–82.

133 *Epistolario Guarino Veronese*, ed. Remigio Sabbadini, 3 vols. (Venice: la Società, 1915), I, 642. See Anthony Grafton, *Commerce with the Classics: Ancient Books and Renaissance Readers* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 22–23; Christian Jacob, “From Book to Text: Towards a Comparative History of Philologies,” *Diogenes* 47 (1999): 4–22 (9–10).

Although he did not specifically work on Jesus texts, we must mention Angelo Poliziano (1454–94)<sup>134</sup> as a key figure in the development of plain-ken philology in the Far West. With Poliziano, the Far West had, unarguably, caught up with Core philology. First, Poliziano removed a criterion: he went back to the first step of the authority chain that could be reasonably relied on, and built from that. How? Imagine a set of closely related sources A', A'', A''' and a significantly different source B.

A' = Surprisingly, the cow mowed the lawn.

A'' = Astonishingly, the cow mowed.

A''' = Amazingly, the cow mowed lawns.

...

B = The cow owned a house with a lawn in the suburbs, and once a month mowed.

Which was more likely to be correct? Traditionally, Christian scholars would go with A, as being more numerous. Taking genealogy into account, Poliziano's insight was weighted, and the A-variations counted as a single source, compared to B. Priority was no longer clear. Source A no longer gained greater authority due to its greater progeny. Source A and Source B were now weighted the same.

Poliziano also created a new criterion: his great discovery, or re-discovery, was the principle *lectio difficilior potior*, that the more difficult text is the more powerful one. Manuscript copyists and editors act in history, as humans, with human psychology, and would be more likely to clean up confusion than introduce new confusion; therefore, the more confusing passage was less likely to have been polished, and was more likely to be original. The ugly was true. Clarity implied intervention. Editors (mis)correct apparent errors, which was annoying, since the errors "preserve some fairly clear traces of the true reading which we must restore. Dishonest scribes have expunged these completely from the new texts." From the deep ken, a polished manuscript could be beautiful. From the plain ken, it might well be too good to be true. History was thus brought to bear on text criticism; texts were understood to have existed in history. Reaching far back in tradition, Poliziano found in Cyprian (d. 258) an ally against tradition, quoting, "Custom unsupported by truth is long-lived error." Hoping to impress the Medici, Poliziano developed and popularized this principle.<sup>135</sup>

134 Grafton, *Defenders*, 47–75; L. D. Reynolds and N. G. Wilson, *Scribes and Scholars: A Guide to the Transmission of Greek and Latin Literature* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1968), 119–21, 128–29.

135 Angelus Politianus, *Opera*, 3 vols. (Lyons: Sebastian Gryphius, 1539), I, 484, 612. This translation is from Grafton, *Defenders*, 58. See Cyprian, *Opera Omnia*, Corpus

We can better understand Poliziano's idea using earlier Eastern examples from which he may have indirectly borrowed. In early-tenth-century Kashmir, the scholar Vallabhadeva was an expert on Kalidasa's *Raghuvamśa* [Lineage of Raghu], a five-century-old text that had proliferated widely in India, creating a bewildering number of inconsistent manuscripts. How to choose which manuscript was oldest? Against our expectations, Vallabhadeva preferred the manuscript with the most odd and obscure (*aprasiddha* अप्रसिद्ध) passages.<sup>136</sup> Similarly, in China two centuries later, perhaps independently from Vallabhadeva, the scholar Wu Yu 吳域 (ca. 1100–54) most valued texts that were *jiqu-aoya* 詰屈聱牙, “query-curling and tooth-twisting.”<sup>137</sup> Why? To these scholars, as to Poliziano, a manuscript that was straightforward and polished was suspicious. You and I are probably sympathetic to this rule and to the plain-ken sensibility behind it. The plain ken accepts and values apparent errors as guarantees of authenticity, because truth is stranger than fiction. A recent dissertation announced in its preface that “the mistakes contained herein provide evidence that this is my own original work.”<sup>138</sup>

### Lorenzo Valla

Poliziano's contemporary Lorenzo Valla was the great Jesus philologist of the century. Valla was painfully aware of the problem in the history of manuscript transmission. Noting Jerome's similar concerns, already in the fourth century, Valla reasoned, “if within just four hundred years those streams were flowing so muddily from the source, it is evident that after a thousand years—for it has been almost as many between Jerome and the present—this stream, never having been cleaned, has in some parts amassed filth and slime.” Valla understood that Jerome could make mistakes in choosing one Greek manuscript over another, and that he could make mistakes in translation.<sup>139</sup> Valla's highly

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Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 3 (Vienna: Geroldi filium, 1868) 806–07. Here, Cyprian is following Tertullian, and commenting on Jn 14:6, where Jesus identifies with *veritatis*.

136 *Vallabhadeva's Kommentar (śāradā-Version) zum Kumārasambhava des Kālidāsa*, ed. M. S. Narayana Murti (Wiesbaden: F. Steiner, 1980), 27. See Sheldon Pollock, “What Was Philosophy in Sanskrit?,” in *World Philology*, ed. Sheldon Pollock, Benjamin A. Elman, and Ku-ming Kevin Chang (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2015), 114–36 (121).

137 葉國良, *宋人疑經改經考* (Taipei: 國立臺灣大學出版委員會, 1980), 49.

138 Richard Oakes, Jr., “The Cross of Christ: Islamic Perspectives” (PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2013), xxi.

139 Lorenzo Valla, *Collatio Novi Testamenti*, ed. Alessandro Perosa (Florence: Sansoni, 1970), 6. See Christopher S. Celenza, “Lorenzo Valla's Radical Philology: The ‘Preface’ to the Annotations to the New Testament in Context,” *Journal*

unusual solution to this squalid stream was to turn to the Greek manuscripts, which revealed problems in the Vulgate text.<sup>140</sup>

First, Valla ruled that the Vulgate was inaccurate in its translation of the Greek. Take 1 Corinthians 15:51, for example: the Vulgate had “we shall all rise, but not all of us will be changed.” The Latin differed from the original Greek, twice, and each difference loomed large over questions of Jesus’s Resurrection. The Greek had “we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed.” Valla explained the corruption by looking to Jn 5:28–29 (“all who are in the tombs will hear His voice and will come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life”), which suggested that everyone would be dead (“in the tombs”) before resurrection. Here, Valla was not looking for a theological answer in the John verse, but instead used it to explain a plain-ken response: the copyist who introduced the corruption wanted to make the verse in Corinthians consonant with the verse in John.<sup>141</sup>

Valla psycho-historicized copyists in other examples as well. They smoothed out, incorrectly, correct readings that were *difficilior*, more difficult to understand. They modified the tenses of verbs in Mt 21:26 in order to make the prophecy consonant with the first-century setting.<sup>142</sup> Valla came across several Vulgate manuscripts that removed “false” from “prophets” in Lk 6:26, radically changing the text’s meaning; here, he again imagined a copyist who was influenced by the “prophets” in 6:23, where they were mentioned without “false.” Mt 17:2 described the transfiguration of Jesus, when, according to the Vulgate, his clothing became as white as *nix* [snow]. The original Greek, however, instead compared the whiteness to φῶς *phos* [light], and Valla suspects the original Latin translation *lux* [light] evolved into *nix*, perhaps due to the two words’ similar appearances—“lu” and “ni” can appear manuscripts identically as three

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of *Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 42 (2012): 365–94 (380–82), <https://doi.org/10.1215/10829636-1571912>; Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ*, 35.

140 On Valla, see Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ*, 32–69; Salvatore I. Camporeale, *Lorenzo Valla: Umanesimo e teologia* (Florence: Istituto Palazzo Strozzi, 1972), 353–58; Luce Giard, “Lorenzo Valla: la langue comme lieu du vrai,” *Histoire Épistémologie Langage* 4 (1982): 5–19; Kelley, *Foundations of Modern Historical Scholarship*, 32–33; Lodi Nauta, *In Defense of Common Sense: Lorenzo Valla’s Humanist Critique of Scholastic Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2009); Debora Shuger, *The Renaissance Bible* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), 17–21, 47–48; David M. Whitford, “The Papal Antichrist: Martin Luther and the Underappreciated Influence of Lorenzo Valla,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 61 (2008): 26–52, <https://doi.org/10.1353/ren.2008.0027>; Lorenzo Valla, *Collatio Novi Testamenti*, ed. Alessandro Perosa (Florence: Sansoni, 1970).

141 Lorenzo Valla, *Annotationes in Nouum Testamentum*, in *Opera Omnia*, 2 vols. (Turin: Bottega d’Erasmus, 1962), I, 869; Valla, *Collatio*, 212–13. See Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ*, 55–56.

142 Valla, *Annotationes*, I, 818; Valla, *Collatio*, 63.

short vertical strokes—or perhaps in consonance with the same discrepancy present in Mk 9:3.<sup>143</sup>

Valla's second criticism of the Vulgate was that it was inelegant and ungrammatical. The Vulgate was sometimes too literal in its translations. Lk 1:79 in the Vulgate used an infinitive (*illuminare*) after a gerund (*dirigendos*), an order Valla found stylistically offensive. Mk 4:41's *alteruter* was used by the Vulgate as reciprocal ("each other"), but Valla found no one else before the fifth century using it in this way. Its classical meaning was, rather, disjunctive ("either one or the other").<sup>144</sup>

At times, this was philology without the plain ken. Valla was reading the text against a deep-ken sense of how Latin, always, should be—not taking into account changes in time, or among cultures: he was annoyed by Mt 2:4's *principes sacerdotum* [chief priests], since *pontifices* [pontiffs] was more elevated—imposing Latin normative terms on Jewish culture. Similarly, he discovered that the Vulgate omitted a final clause ("for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever") from the Lord's Prayer (Mt 6:13), which the Greek manuscripts preserved—in this case, however, he did not allow for the historical nuance necessary to realize that the missing clause was actually a late importation from the Greek orthodox liturgy. Here the Latin reflected the original better than the Greek, but for the ahistorical facet of Valla's philology any Greek manuscript was better than any Latin manuscript.<sup>145</sup>

More often, Valla made creative use of the plain ken's sense of history. His sharpest philological critiques were to expose texts as not being authored by their nominal authors. The most famous was the Donation of Constantine. According to the Donation, the Emperor Constantine gave to the pope authority over the patriarchal sees at Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, and Constantinople. Valla, however, objected to this idea: "How in the world—this is much more absurd, and impossible in the nature of things—could one speak of Constantinople as one of the patriarchal sees, when it was not yet a patriarchate, nor a see, nor a Christian city, nor named Constantinople, nor founded, nor planned!" Valla noted that the Donation of Constantine had consonance with neither the language nor the culture of that Emperor's fourth-century world. Valla unravelled the Donation's

143 Valla, *Collatio*, 55. See Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ*, 43; Celenza, "Lorenzo Valla's Radical Philology," 378.

144 Valla, *Annotationes*, I, 825 (Mk 4), 830 (Lk 1); Valla, *Collatio*, 102 (Lk 1:79). See Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ*, 50; Celenza, "Lorenzo Valla's Radical Philology," 374–75; Jacques Chomarat, "Les Annotations de Valla, celles d'Erasmus et la grammaire," in *Histoire de l'exégèse au XVIe siècle*, ed. Olivier Fatio and Pierre Fraenkel (Geneva: Droz, 1978), 211–12.

145 Valla, *Annotationes*, I, 806, 810 (Mt 2, 6). See Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ*, 45–46; Shuger, *The Renaissance Bible*, 19.

description of the imperial clothing as “the purple mantle and scarlet tunic” by understanding it as a concatenation of two Gospel verses: “Because Matthew [27:28] says ‘a scarlet robe,’ and John [19:2] ‘a purple robe,’ this fellow tries to join them together in the same passage.”<sup>146</sup>

We can contrast that with less plain-ken engagement with the Donation. For example, John Whethamstede (d. 1465) defended the Donation against Reginald Pecock (ca. 1395–1461): Whethamstede listed many sources testifying to the truth of the Donation, but did not care that none of the sources were from the period of the Donation. Similarly, although neither Mark nor Matthew mentioned it, the self-destruction of local idols in Egypt upon the Infant Jesus’s arrival was certainly true, Whethamstede held, because Jerome had taken the incident seriously. The plain ken would be perplexed by both arguments.<sup>147</sup>

Like a bull in the church library, Valla exposed, by demonstrating spurious authorship, a number of other Jesus-related texts. The Apostles Creed, as a result of poetic-numerical analysis, had long been associated with Jesus’s disciples: each of twelve disciples had written one of the Creed’s twelve articles, with deep-ken numerical consonance. Valla demonstrated that the Creed was created by the Councils of Nicea and Constantinople in the fourth century. Dionysius the Areopagite mentioned that the eclipse occurring at the death of Jesus (Mt 27:45) also occurred in Athens, but no Greek sources confirm this; Valla concluded, then, that this text’s author was a later writer, now known as Pseudo-Dionysius. Because Jerome did not use the Vulgate when he quoted from the Bible, Valla argued, he was unlikely to be its translator.<sup>148</sup>

Thus, Valla was one of the first (excluding many Greeks) to supplement the study of Latin manuscripts of the Vulgate (he used four) with a return to Greek manuscripts (he used at least seven). He was the first person in the Latin Far West to really work with the New Testament’s Greek in over a millennium. He never, however, attempted to do his own Greek translation or to systematize the variants he found.<sup>149</sup>

Valla did little more than challenge authorship, and otherwise mostly conserved tradition and sometimes repaired its failings. He offered, rather than formally proposed, changes to the Vulgate. Although Valla used his philology to push against the more reaching ideas about confession and predestination, he did

146 Lorenzo Valla, *The Treatise of Lorenzo Valla on the Donation of Constantine*, trans. Christopher B. Coleman (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1922), 15, 94–95, 103–17.

147 BL Cotton MS Nero C VI, fol. 56v–58v. See E. F. Jacob, “*Florida Verborum Venustas*,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 17 (1933), 274–78.

148 Lorenzo Valla, *Antidoti in Pogiium* and *Apologia pro se & contra calumniatores*, in *Opera Omnia*, I, 360–61, 800; Valla, *Annotationes*, I, 837 (Lk 16) See Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ*, 47, 50, 65.

149 Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ*, 47.



not push too far.<sup>150</sup> Valla presented himself, and I believe understood himself, not as an enemy of the Bible but as its protector. When Poggio Bracciolini (1380–1459) denounced Valla's methods as "darts cast" at Jesus, Valla snarled that he sought not to "declare war on Christ," but to serve him. Valla's *Adnotations* skipped the 1 Corinthians issue on the Resurrection, and refused to pursue the corruption at Lk 1:29 that he had noted elsewhere, "lest I appear to doubt reliance (*fide*) on scripture."<sup>151</sup> In 1444, Valla was summoned before the Inquisition of Naples after he questioned the traditional authorship of the Creed and the Abgar letter. Although Valla characterized the Church itself as unversed in the matters he was discussing, he agreed to believe whatever the Church believed.<sup>152</sup>

In dedicating his *Annotations to the New Testament* to Pope Nicholas V (1397–1455), Valla framed his work as answering a papal claim: "And you, Nicholas V [...] owing to your unbelievable zeal for the Christian religion, seem without even saying so to order those learned in Greek to find those places in the New Testament where, like certain places in a temple, it is 'leaking', so to speak; and then to report those places back to you." He claimed a new authority in a plain-ken way. Around 1450, he defended his translation against Bracciolini thus: Valla did "not correct Sacred Scripture, but rather its interpretation, nor am I being insulting in this, but rather pious. Nor do I anything other than convey a better translation than the prior translator, so that my translation, if it is true, would be called Sacred Scripture, not his."<sup>153</sup>

### Desiderius Erasmus

Desiderius Erasmus (1466–1536) represents a major shift towards recognizing and valuing historical contexts.<sup>154</sup> Earlier authors had shown some interest in

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150 Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ*, 64.

151 Valla, *Antidoti*, I, 341, 830. See Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ*, 56, 64–66.

152 Luigi Amabile, *Il Santo Officio della inquisizione in Napoli narrazione con molti documenti inediti*, 2 vols. (Città di Castello: S. Lapi, 1892) I, 77. English scholarship has incorporated a quite brash translation of this source: e.g., "He could not resist adding that it was quite true that she knew nothing" (Grant, *A Short History*, 101). Actually, the Italian is ambiguous: Valla could be saying that the Church is ignorant of, or ignores, the matter.

153 Lorenzo Valla, *Antidotum Primum: La prima apologia contro Poggio Bracciolini*, ed. Ari Wesseling (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1978), 112. See Celenza, "Lorenzo Valla's Radical Philology," 365, 380.

154 The literature on Erasmus is immense. See, in particular, Peter Bietenholz, *Encounters with a Radical Erasmus: Erasmus' Work as a Source of Radical Thought in Early Modern Europe* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 18–19, 186, 238–39; Heinz Holeczek, *Humanistische Bibelphilologie als Reformproblem bei Erasmus von Rotterdam, Thomas More und William Tyndale* (Leiden: Brill, 1975); Greta

the world of the historical Jesus. Denis the Carthusian used local Jerusalem agricultural geography to find a “probable” interpretation for a Gospel passage. Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–94) created his prediction for the return of Jesus by studying Jewish calendrical knowledge and periodization.<sup>155</sup> Erasmus was more consistent in this approach, and applied it more broadly.

Influenced by Valla, Erasmus made use of philology, but he tended to look more at phrases than at individual words and valued capturing nuance rather than being technically correct. In 1509, Erasmus began to collect and collate manuscripts of the New Testament, using among others those brought back by John of Ragusa; Erasmus had great faith in scripture but doubted scholars’ ability to interpret it (“conjecture”).<sup>156</sup>

Erasmus wanted to jump the chain of authorities: He had a suspicion of recent tradition, and an enthusiasm for the early days. He praised the English scholar John Colet (1467–1519) for “trying to bring back the Christianity of the apostles, and clear away the thorns and briars with which it is overgrown.” Recognizing that dogma was historically conditioned, Erasmus reflected that “I could have the same opinions as the Arians and Pelagians if the Church had accepted what they taught.”<sup>157</sup> Poking fun at tradition, Erasmus mentions a story of a priest who, over a number of years, had misread the liturgical word *sumpsimus* (“we have taken”) as the non-existent word *mumpsimus*. Corrected,

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Kroeker, *Erasmus in the Footsteps of Paul* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), <https://doi.org/10.3138/9781442662698>; Friedhelm Krüger, *Humanistische Evangelienauslegung: Desiderius Erasmus von Rotterdam als Ausleger der Evangelien in seinen Paraphrasen* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1986); Hilmar Pabel and Mark Vessey, ed., *Holy Scripture Speaks: Studies in the Production and Reception of Erasmus’ Paraphrases on the New Testament* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002); Hilmar Pabel, “The Prince of Peace: Erasmus’ Conception of Jesus,” in *The Unbounded Community: Papers on Christian Ecumenism in Honor of Jaroslav Pelikan*, ed. William P. Caferro and Duncan Fisher (New York: Garland, 1996), 127–48; Albert Rabil, Jr., *Erasmus and the New Testament* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1972); Erika Rummel, *Erasmus’ Annotations on the New Testament: From Philologist to Theologian* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), 156–60; Shuger, *The Renaissance Bible*, 19–25.

155 Denis the Carthusian, *Enarratio in Genesim*, in *Opera Omnia*, I, 445. See Brian Ogren, “The Forty-Nine Gates of Wisdom as Forty-Nine Ways to Christ: Giovanni Pico della Mirandola’s *Heptaplus* and Nahmanidean Kabbalah,” *Rinascimento* 49 (2009): 27–43 (32).

156 Christine Christ-von Wedel, *Erasmus of Rotterdam: Advocate of a New Christianity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 59; E. J. Kenney, *The Classical Text: Aspects of Editing in the Age of the Printed Book* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1974), 76.

157 Erasmus, “Erasmus to Willibald Pirckheimer, 19 October 1527,” in *Opus Epistolarum*, ed. P. S. Allen and H. M. Allen, 12 vols. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1906–58), VII, 216. Translation from C. Augustijn, “The Ecclesiology of Erasmus,” in *Scrinium Erasmanum*, ed. Joseph Coppen, 2 vols. (Brill, Leiden, 1969), II, 153. See J. A. Froude, *Life and Letters of Erasmus* (New York: Scribner, 1948), 48.

the priest decided the mistake had gone on too long to change now and declined to replace the “old” *mumpsimus* with the “new” *sumpsimus*.<sup>158</sup>

We can see this from another perspective by looking at his critics. In opposing Erasmus, the theologian Martinus Dorpius (1485–1525) appealed to tradition:

It is not reasonable [*consentaneum*] that the whole church, which has always used this edition [the Vulgate] and still both approves and uses it, should for all these centuries have been wrong. Nor is it probable [*verisimile*] that all those holy Fathers should have been deceived and all those saintly men who relied on this version when deciding the most difficult questions in general councils...<sup>159</sup>

With this approach to tradition, Erasmus argued for a number of specific policy changes based on plain-ken philology. Erasmus called for the moderation of Lenten rules, preaching rooted in scripture, and better instruction and preparation for the Eucharist. He used philology to show that Jesus told his hearers to *repent*, not (as the Vulgate ran) to “do penance,” thus undermining support for the sacrament of confession. Erasmus accepted that Bohemia’s Utraquists should be allowed to select their own priests, in part because it had once been normal, historically.<sup>160</sup>

### The New New Testament

Like his attitude to tradition generally, Erasmus recognized the goodness and reliability of the original scriptures, and hoped to correct corruptions that had entered the manuscript tradition. Erasmus knew that even though the Bible itself held no errors, they could creep into its manuscripts.

Erasmus’s most enduring contribution to the Jesus cult was his edition of the Greek New Testament. This was accidental, for his intent was to do a new Latin translation. To defend this against monogamous lovers of the Vulgate, he also worked up a Greek text, corrected against multiple manuscripts. Erasmus

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158 Erasmus, “Erasmus to Henry Bullock, August 1516,” *Opus Epistolarum*, ed. Allen and Allen, II, 321–29.

159 Martin van Dorp, “Martin van Dorp to Erasmus, c. September, 1514,” in *Opus Epistolarum*, ed. Allen and Allen, II, 14. English translation from *The Correspondence of Erasmus, Letters 298–445 (1514–16)*, trans. R. A. B. Mynors and D. F. S. Thomson, *Collected Works of Erasmus [CWE]* 3 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), 21 (ep. 344).

160 Erasmus, “Erasmus to John Slechts, November 1, 1519,” in *Opus Epistolarum*, ed. Allen and Allen, IV, 113–19. See Christ-von Wedel, *Erasmus of Rotterdam*, 3–4; David Wright, “The Reformation to 1700,” in *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Bible*, ed. John Rogerson (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001), 198–99.

wanted an updated, usable Latin New Testament so that more people could use it, and included the Greek to give his Latin greater weight. This is why he called it in early editions the *Novum Instrumentum* [The New Instrument]—his focus was updating the Latin Vulgate. Thus, Erasmus was less a Greek specialist than a reformer trying to make the canon more accessible—a limited version of the impulse behind vernacular translation. He similarly prepared his *Paraphrases* with the intent that the Gospels become available to “the farmer, the tailor, the stonemason, prostitutes, pimps, and Turks.” Again, drawing from history, Erasmus insisted on the possibility of translation sufficient, with the help of commentary, to preserve essential meaning: “the evangelists did not fear to write in Greek just because Christ spoke Aramaic. The Romans were not afraid to translate the apostolic speech into Latin, that is, to set it forth for the indiscriminate multitude.”<sup>161</sup> In the *Paraphrases*, Erasmus updated the angel Gabriel’s greeting to Mary (Lk 1:28) to decrease the awesomeness and increase the human. Erasmus himself described the salutation as an “amorous greeting.”<sup>162</sup>

Erasmus used six partial manuscripts, all relatively recent, from the previous six centuries. The Vulgate still played a role. When Erasmus suspected corruptions in the Greek manuscript corpus he used instead the Vulgate. He even translated from the Vulgate back—or indeed for the first time—into Greek to make additions to those manuscripts. In one case, however, he found a Greek manuscript was likely corrupted precisely because it consonated with the Vulgate.<sup>163</sup>

Let us consider Mt 27:9, which attributed to Jeremiah a quotation that was in fact from Zechariah. Why? Erasmus suggested that was the error either of Matthew or of a later scribe. Perhaps Matthew quoted from memory and erred. Alternatively, Erasmus suggested this could be from some lost apocryphal

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161 Erasmus, “Paraphrase on Matthew,” in *New Testament Scholarship: Paraphrase on Matthew*, ed. R. D. Sider, trans. D. Simpson, CWE 45, 17. See Paul Botley, *Latin Translation in the Renaissance: The Theory and Practice of Leonardo Bruni, Giannozzo Manetti, and Desiderius Erasmus* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2008), 115–63; William W. Combs, “Erasmus and the Textus Receptus,” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 1 (1996): 35–53; H. J. De Jonge, “Novum Testamentum a Nobis Versum: The Essence of Erasmus’s Edition of the New Testament,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 35 (1984): 394–413; Evans, *Language and Logic*, 78; Wright, “Reformation,” 198–99.

162 From “Ave, gratia plena” to “Ave et gaude, virgo gratiosa.” Erasmus, “Apologia ad Monachos quosdam Hispanos,” in *Opera Omnia*, ed. Jean Leclerc, 10 vols. (Leiden: Lugduni Batavorum Vander 1703–06), IX, col. 1084.

163 Hauser and Watson, *A History of Biblical Interpretation*, 233–37.

passage of the Old Testament. We have to adopt a variety of approaches, Erasmus advised, just as Jesus used a *varietas* of tactics in the Gospel.<sup>164</sup>

Careful reading of the Bible text allowed Erasmus to poke at theology. He found no evidence in scripture that Jesus's words matched those spoken by priests when celebrating the Eucharist. He noted that in Greek the word "God" had the definite article, but not the word "son," a finding that would later have major anti-Trinitarian implications. In 1 Corinthians 11:24, Paul recalls the words of Jesus at the Last Supper. In the Vulgate they are "receive, eat, this *is* my body" (emphasizing simultaneous speaking and consecrating). In the original Greek, however, they more resemble "receive, eat this my body" (suggesting that he was speaking and giving something that had been previously consecrated).<sup>165</sup>

Erasmus, suspicious, omitted the Johannine Comma (1 Jn 5:7–8) from his first and second editions. A now debunked story recalls that in response to criticism he agreed to include the Comma if a single manuscript would testify to its inclusion. A Franciscan at Oxford produced such a manuscript, and although Erasmus suspected it had been produced only after he had issued his challenge, he included the Comma in his third edition. In fact, he did indeed obtain a copy of a Greek manuscript that had the Comma, but no evidence suggests that he thought it had been produced to meet the alleged challenge. He rather believed that it had been produced during the Council of Florence-Ferrara (1438–45) to align with the Vulgate.<sup>166</sup>

Erasmus's New Testament was hugely successful. Knowing of the simultaneous work on the Complutensian Polyglot Bible in Spain (see below), he rushed his first edition, which he later called "precipitated rather than edited"; it was riddled with errors. His observation that sacred texts were bestsellers, that "the world goes crazy for them," applied no less to his own work. Dozens of pirated editions appeared in the major publishing cities of Europe. His fourth edition, in 1527, the most famous and enduring, took advantage of the Complutensian Polyglot's text, which was, for the most part, superior to what he had been using. That edition included the Vulgate, facilitating the comparison

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164 Bietenholz, *Encounters with a Radical Erasmus*, 144; Shuger, *The Renaissance Bible*, 27–28; Erasmus, "Annotations," in *Opera Omnia*, ed. Leclerc, VI, col. 139–40; Erasmus, "Ratio verae theologiae," in *Opera Omnia*, ed. Leclerc, V, 92–93.

165 Erasmus, "Apologia ad Monachos quosdam Hispanos," col. 1015–94; Erasmus, "Annotations," col. 205, 243, 716.

166 Henk Jan De Jonge, "Erasmus and the Comma Johanneum," *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses*, 56 (1980): 381–89 (383) knows of no mention of this promise before Thomas Hartwell Horne, *An Introduction to the Critical Study and Knowledge of the Holy Scriptures* (London: Cadell, 1823), 107–08. See also Bruce M. Metzger and Bart D. Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005), 101.

of that text with Erasmus's new Latin. Critics approved of the Greek text—given the widespread ignorance of Greek they were passing judgment more on the idea than on any specifics in the text itself—but Erasmus's Latin stirred up controversy.<sup>167</sup>

### History and Intentionality

Erasmus distinguished between the essential, deep-ken meaning of Christianity and the plain-ken context in which it was delivered. He noted that “there are some [passages] which pertain to the disciples and those times; there are others for all times. Some things are conceded to those times' affections; a few are laughed at ironically.”<sup>168</sup> This made knowledge of historical circumstances necessary. Knowing history, like knowing languages, improved the accuracy of translation.

This distinction, far from consigning history to the rubbish heap, allowed Erasmus to use it in his interpretation. He still created a historicizing space in which to interpret scripture. In Mt 26:45, Jesus advises his disciples to “sleep and rest”—when they were already asleep. A long tradition explained this oddity through allegorical interpretation. Erasmus, however, broke with this tradition: “it's possible the speech of Christ has some irony.” Moving beyond Valla's focus on the words themselves, Erasmus expanded on the “dictionary definition” of *salutaveritis* (Mt 5:47), “to greet,” to include a kiss and an embrace, because in the past that was a part of Jewish, Greek, and Roman culture (*mos*). Allegory was replaced by nuance (intentionality), and theology shifted to an imagined human lived experience and social praxis.<sup>169</sup>

In contrast to the historical Jesus, who used simple and clear language, “today” theologians employed “newly coined expressions” and “strange sounding words.” Jesus never referred to Aristotle, nor used abstract exoticisms like “primary and secondary intentions” or “quiddities.”<sup>170</sup> Erasmus described

167 Erasmus, “Erasmus to Nicholas Ellenbog, April, 1516,” *Opus Epistolarum*, ed. Allen and Allen, II, 226; Erasmus, “Erasmus to Francis Asulanus, March 18, 1523,” *Opus Epistolarum*, ed. Allen and Allen, V, 253. See Hauser and Watson, *A History of Biblical Interpretation*, 234–35; Metzger and Ehrman, *Text of the New Testament*, 102–03.

168 Erasmus, “Methodus [1516],” in *Ausgewählte Werke*, ed. Annemarie and Hajo Holborn (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1964), 158. See Christ-von Wedel, *Erasmus of Rotterdam*, 58–97.

169 Erasmus, “Annotations,” col. 33, 136. See Mt 26:45. Of course, Erasmus still appreciated the importance of allegory. See Shuger, *The Renaissance Bible*, 34–35 and Grant, *A Short History*, 102.

170 Erasmus, “Methodus,” 155. See Christ-von Wedel, *Erasmus of Rotterdam*, 67.

the language of the New Testament as “how waggoners and sailors talked then.” Any infelicities might offend modern ears, but “in those days it was advisable to write like that.”<sup>171</sup> Since we are only able to work with a Greek approximation of Jesus’s exact words, we need to understand language and context to be able to jump from that approximation to Jesus’s own meaning. “If Christ’s sayings survived in Hebrew or Syriac, handed down, that is, in the same words in which he first uttered them,” Erasmus fantasized, “who would not love to think them out for himself and to weigh up the full force and proper sense of every word and even every letter? At least we possess the next best thing to this,” the Gospels.<sup>172</sup> In another passage he marvelled, “now if we would learn from the historians’ writings not only the location, but the origin, mores, institutes, cultic practices, and genius of the nations where the actions of the apostles happened, or to whom they wrote, it is amazing to say how much light, and even life, would be added to the reading.”<sup>173</sup>

This historicizing attitude powerfully shapes Erasmus’s Jesus as a person in historical time. Erasmus thus emphasized Jesus’s humanity—his human nature suffered under the fear of death, a fear expressed in tears. There were limits on the ways Jesus could be human. Erasmus was amused by Colet’s understanding of a Jesus so full of an inhuman love as to overcome his own suffering; he teased Colet by mocking an even more human simile, comparing this transcendent Jesus to “blind” lovers “amid the darkening gloom and biting winds of a freezing night, they burn with passion; sleepless nights cannot weary them, hunger cannot touch them, and trysts with ghosts and goblins hold no terrors for them.” Erasmus, instead, linked Jesus’s suffering and his love in a mutually reinforcing relationship: “As his sorrows were heaped up like a pile of kindling the inextinguishable flame of his love burned ever brighter.”<sup>174</sup>

Erasmus’s 1523 treatment of Hilary of Poitiers (ca. 310–67) illustrates how, in his eyes, tradition could itself be historicized, as well as his intellectual caution more generally. Erasmus had to defend the very nature of his investigation into a saint’s writings: “Reverence is the due of ancient authors, especially those authors who are recommended by the sanctity of their lives.” However, “this reverence does not exclude a critical reading of them.” Here Erasmus sought “to emend the text of ancient authors which have been corrupted in various

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171 “Erasmus to Adrian VI, August 1, 1522,” in *The Correspondence of Erasmus: Letters 1252 to 1355, 1522 to 1523*, trans. R. A. B. Mynors, CWE 9, 149 (ep. 1304).

172 Erasmus, “To the Reader,” in *Correspondence of Erasmus, Letters 298–445*, trans. Mynors and Thomson, 203–04 (Allen and Allen, *Opus Epistolarum*, ep. 373).

173 Erasmus, “Methodus,” 153–54.

174 Erasmus, “A Short Debate Concerning the Distress, Alarm, and Sorrow of Jesus [Disputatiuncula de taedio, pavore, tristitia Iesu],” in *Spiritualia and Pastoralia*, trans. Michael J. Heath, CWE 70, 43, 60–66, 80.

ways through fault of the times and copyists," and through "the rashness of half-learned and foolhardy men." Looking at Hilary's writings, he first noted extensive later editions, and realized that typically copyists had edited out Hilary's mistakes in not teaching the divinity of the Holy Spirit because they did not believe ancient theologians could make mistakes; they thought they were restoring the text to its original truth. Hilary and the subsequent copyists of his work disagreed on whether Jesus felt pain, and the copyists changed any text that they perceived as errors. Each human, "however learned and keen-sighted he may be, on occasion stumbles and gropes blindly." Only scripture was free from error. Erasmus also noted that Hilary's historical context influenced his writing.<sup>175</sup>

In another work, Erasmus explained that the Church itself developed through time: "Now the church has passed through its infancy, its coming of age, its maturity, and perhaps its old age as well; and further, although there is such a great variety of epochs and countries." Because of this variability of time and places, Erasmus criticized those who did not adapt their standards of evaluation to the historical moment: "Some examine all writings by the standards of the present age, thus showing themselves at one and the same time ungrateful towards those worthy of their gratitude and hurtful to themselves."<sup>176</sup>

Erasmus saw this same history, with the plain ken, and possibility of error even in the first century, even in the Evangelists, despite their inspiration by the Holy Spirit. Each Gospel author had a distinct role. In the *Paraphrases*, Erasmus had Matthew explain that he put the oral tradition into writing to protect it and stabilize it, and predict—using Erasmus's future knowledge—that someday the written will be more respected than the oral. Erasmus saw Luke as a historian acting in time to make decisions about the reliability of various sources available to him. Themselves existing in history, these human authors could make mistakes. Even Jesus's first followers were just "men, who were ignorant of certain things and erred in some things."<sup>177</sup>

Critics charged that Erasmus impiously and incorrectly rendered the Bible a human artifact. One of his opponents, disapprovingly, captured the essence of the Erasmian plain ken well: "You seem to suggest that the evangelists wrote

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175 "Erasmus to Jean de Carondelet, January 5, 1523," in *The Correspondence of Erasmus: Letters 1252 to 1355*, trans. Mynors, 246–49, 274.

176 Erasmus, "Erasmus to Nikolaus von Diesbach 6 July 1527," *The Correspondence of Erasmus: Letters 1802 to 1925*, trans. Charles Fantazzi, CWE 13, 205.

177 Erasmus, "Paraphrase on Matthew," 15–16; Erasmus, "Paraphrase on John," in *Paraphrase on John*, ed. Robert D. Sider and Jane E. Phillips, CWE 46, 14–15 [Jn 1]; Erasmus, "Annotations," col. 476 [Acts 10:38]; Erasmus, "An Exposition of Psalm 33," in *Expositions of the Psalms*, ed. Dominic Baker-Smith, Emily Kearns, and Caroline White, CWE 64, 294–95.



like ordinary men, in that they wrote this in reliance on their memories and failed to inspect the written sources, and so for this reason made a mistake."<sup>178</sup> Erasmus replied that the Holy Spirit was "present" in the evangelists "so far as pertained to the business of the Gospel," but "in other respects he allowed them to be human none the less." Because the core meaning remained safe, such minor errors did not matter. Erasmus concluded, "I deny that the presence of some mistake must needs shake the credit of the whole of scripture."<sup>179</sup> Indeed, like the simplicity of Jesus's language, the Gospels' inconsistencies make their endurance more impressive and invite us to "examine a hidden mystery." First, we consider the possibility of a copyist error. If that has been ruled out, then "the apparent absurdity is signalling to us to examine a deeper mystery"—that is, this was intentional. If we cannot solve it, it is our fault, not scripture's. We then need to become more knowledgeable or "ask the Lord to open the hidden treasure for us."<sup>180</sup>

At the end of the day, Erasmus, like Valla, was still powerfully bound by tradition, and not that unwillingly: he used both tradition and theology to understand the Bible. Many readers were unhappy with Erasmus's decision (in the second, 1519 edition) to translate the Word (Λόγος) of Jn 1:1 ("In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God") as *sermo* [speech] instead of the usual *verbum* [word]. He did employ philology to demonstrate Λόγος's lexical ambiguity, but developed a supporting argument based on theology (a *sermo* is longer than a *verbum*, which makes it consonate better with Jn 12:50 ("So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say"). Additionally, the Church Fathers in Christianity's first centuries used *sermo*. "In all things," Erasmus holds, "one must submit to the judgment of the Church." This phrase, however, he followed with his own "however," a word that made room for this new plain-ken appreciation of history.<sup>181</sup>

178 Johann Maier von Eck, "Johann Maier von Eck to Erasmus, February 2, 1518," in *Literary Writings and Educational Works*, ed. A. H. T. Levi, CWE 45, 289–90 (Allen and Allen, *Opus Epistolarum*, ep. 769). See Rummel, *Erasmus's Annotations*, 123–42.

179 Erasmus, "Erasmus to Johann Maier von Eck, May 15, 1518," in *Literary Writings and Educational Works*, ed. A. H. T. Levi, CWE 6, 28 (Allen and Allen, *Opus Epistolarum*, ep. 844).

180 Erasmus, "An Exposition of Psalm 33," in *Expositions of the Psalms*, ed. Baker-Smith, Kearns, and White, 294–95.

181 Erasmus, "Annotations," col. 335–37, 716; Erasmus, "Apologia tres ad Notationes Eduardi Lei," in *Opera Omnia*, ed. Jean Leclerc, 10 vols. (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1962), IX, col. 259.

*Cisneros and Nebrija*

We end with a late and complex case of Biblical scholarship. The Franciscan Francisco Jiménez de Cisneros (1436–1517) was the most distinguished prelate in Spanish history. He was regent, inquisitor general, and confessor to Queen Isabella I of Castile (1451–1504); perhaps he inspired her to expel the Jews. He founded the Complutense University, edited and printed the Mozarabic missal and breviary for Toledo, and funded the Complutensian Polyglot. His reforms in the late 1490s emphasized frequent Communion even for the laity and knowledge of the cross, creed, and paternoster.<sup>182</sup>

Cisneros had little patience for a slow, persuasive conversion process: when the Archbishop of Granada had translated canon passages into Arabic so the ex-Muslims could read them themselves, Cisneros complained about “casting pearl before swine,” or before Christians too new in their faith to appreciate the canon. Bibles were meant to be read by the wise people learned in Latin—and ideally in the original Bible languages. Cisneros wanted students of theology to be able to read Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, unlike in Paris, which had no such language requirements. Vernacular translation, according to Cisneros, was dangerous and even ridiculous in this “elderly, calamitous, and deplorable age of the world, when the minds of the common peoples have degenerated so far from the purity they had” in the first century. Among his household, which included a jester and a dwarf, he had a man with a mental disability who would recite scripture, badly, to Cisneros as a form of entertainment.<sup>183</sup> This might have echoed and reinforced his aversion of having scripture in the hands of unfit readers.

Those few who should read scripture, Cisneros thought, should read accurate scripture. Cisneros was concerned that over the centuries Aristotle had distracted Christian scholars away from the Bible, and rendering the clergy ignorant of truth and the laity unable to practice it. The Bible had become far from Christians’ lives. Taking his inspiration from Origen, Cisneros decided to collect all available important texts to publish a reliable Bible that would allow

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182 Erike Rummel, *Jiménez de Cisneros: On the Threshold of Spain's Golden Age* (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 1999), 24; José García Oro, *Cisneros y la reforma del clero español en tiempo de los Reyes Católicos* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1971), 336–39.

183 Alvar Gómez de Castro, *De rebus gestis a Francisco Ximeno* (Alcalá de Henares: Andreas de Angulo, 1569), fol. 32v–33r. See Karl Josef von Hefele, *El cardenal Jiménez de Cisneros y la iglesia española* (Barcelona: Diario, 1869), 346; Rummel, *Jiménez*, 33, 54, 106.

the recovery of Jesus's teachings, by which all wisdom came to humans.<sup>184</sup> The Complutensian Bible's prefaces eventually emphasized maximizing accuracy despite the errors of copyists, though no translation could be perfect, especially when the original language was Jesus's.<sup>185</sup>

The membership of the editorial board, as well as their duties, is not fully clear. The Cretan Demetrius Ducas (ca. 1480–1527), who had worked in humanist publishing in Venice, probably was responsible for the Greek text. Antonio de Nebrija (1444–1522), the foremost humanist scholar in Spain, had spent a decade preparing notes for a critical edition of the Bible. Those notes had been seized by the Inquisition, who, Nebrija believed, felt intimidated by his philological investigations. Cisneros, the head inquisitor, was positively enthusiastic about the project, and protected Nebrija. Nebrija insisted that problems in scripture involving words' meanings belonged to the portfolio of philologists. He outlined his methodology explicitly: consultation of Greek manuscripts to resolve contradictions among the Latin manuscripts. Nebrija gifted Cisneros with a list of "fifty" (really forty-nine) scriptural textual problems which demonstrated problems in orthography (e.g., Lk 15:8–10, Jn 5:2) but were solved by consulting the Greek. For example, in Mt 1:19 he explains *traducere* following Valla. It is not certain if Nebrija knew Valla, but Nebrija was making Vallaesque answers to problems not known to have been taken up by Valla (for example, Mk 5:41 "rise up gazelle" should be "little girl, rise").<sup>186</sup>

The partnership did not endure. At least by the middle of 1515, Nebrija had to resign: Cisneros wanted to create the best possible Vulgate, but Nebrija wanted to improve upon the Vulgate itself. Cisneros's goal involved a limited plain ken, applied to the transmission of the Vulgate but not to its creation. The idea was not to use Greek manuscripts to correct the Vulgate (although they did flag some potential problems), but to overcome the "ignorance and negligence" of copyists. Nebrija also wanted an appendix explaining names that was correct rather than traditional. As a parting gesture Nebrija leaked the news, alarming to the orthodox, that Greeks and converts from Judaism were editing scripture.<sup>187</sup>

184 Gómez de Castro, *De rebus gestis*, fol. 37r–37v. See Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ*, 73.

185 *Vetus testamentum multiplici lingua nunc primo impressum*, 6 vols. (Alcalá de Henares: Academia Complutensi, 1514–17), I, fol. iiir.

186 Nebrija's method did make some mistakes, as in accepting one Greek manuscript's fixing a discrepancy by identifying "son of Jonah" (Mt 16:17) with "son of John" (Jn 21:15–16), on Cisneros's suggestion. Antonio de Nebrija, *Apología*, trans. Baldomero Macías Rosendo (Huelva: Universidad de Huelva, 2014), 58–66, 101–77. See Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ*, 77–86.

187 *Vetus testamentum*, fol. iiira; Antonio de Nebrija, "Epistola del maestro de Lebrija al Cardenal," *Revista de Archivos, Bibliotecas y Museos*, 8 (1903): 493–96.

On 10 January 1514, the first edition of the Greek New Testament was printed—but not published, a milestone Erasmus’s edition reached first; only in 1520 did the Complutensian edition of Cisneros obtain a license to be bound and sold. The Complutensian editors boasted that they used the *vetustissima simul et emendatissima* [simultaneously most ancient and correct] manuscripts available, and likewise the most eminent linguists.<sup>188</sup>

### An Enduring Deep Ken

As we have seen throughout the chapter, despite the Muslim appreciation of the plain ken and the Christian movement towards it, a great deal of deep ken remained. Al-Zarkashi numbered the Qur’an’s surahs, verses, words, and letters, delighting in the longest surah (2) and verse (2:282), the shortest verse (89:1, 93:1), and the longest word (فَسَيَكْفِيكَهُمُ *fasayakfikahum*). For all his plain-ken inclination, al-Suyuti had interests that reflect the deep ken, as in his own counting the number of letters, words, verses, and surahs in the Qur’an. His *Itqan* [Precision] mentions some verses, almost two dozen in particular, that have *fadail* [merit] associated with them in the form of *baraka* [supernatural benefit], ranging from protection in this world to paradise in the next (see Chapter 8).<sup>189</sup>

Christians, of course, were even more ready to maintain the deep ken. Christopher Columbus (1451–1506) understood the Bible’s truths as outside of time, and cited Isidore of Seville’s (d. 636) argument that the Bible used the past tense for future events “because things that are still future to us, have already happened according to God’s viewpoint in eternity.”<sup>190</sup> Paul of Middelburg (1446–1543) remembered Jesus’s claim that “as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish,” so Jesus himself “will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Mt 12:40), and imagined a Jewish rabbi walking back from Jesus’s tomb ready to accuse him of lying for not laying the full three days in the tomb.<sup>191</sup> One Armenian tradition saw Christ in the Old Testament

188 *Vetus testamentum*, fol. iiib, iiiira. See Gómez de Castro, *De rebus gestis*, fol. 37v–38v.

189 Sheila Blair and Jonathan Bloom, “Inscriptions in Art and Architecture,” in *Cambridge Companion to the Qur’ān*, ed. McAuliffe, 163–78 (178); Burge, “Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti,” 281, 291–92; McAuliffe, “The Tasks,” 188; Jane Dammen McAuliffe, “Exegetical Sciences,” in *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur’ān*, ed. Rippin, 403–19 (408–09).

190 Christopher Columbus, *The Libro de las Profecías of Christopher Columbus*, trans. Delno C. West and August Kling (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 1991), 103. The original is Isidore of Seville, *Sententiarum libri tres*, in *Opera Omnia VI*, in *Patrologia Latina*, ed. Migne, LXXXIII, col. 584. Columbus incorrectly identified this as chapter 25.

191 Paul of Middelburg, *Pavlina de recta Paschae celebratione* (Fossombrone: Petrus, 1513), a.ii.v.

since Abraham's tree was the cross, and Noah's ark's window the wound in Jesus's side. Grigor Tatevatsi (1346–1409/10), wrote that "The ram of Isaac was hanging from the sabek tree, which has two branches, and is the true type of the Cross of Christ."<sup>192</sup> Here, the intentionality behind the equivalences is only with God, not with humans. Epiphanius the Wise (d. 1420) retold Jesus's Parable of the Vineyard (Mt 20:1–16), but smoothly substituted the "people of Perm" for the "workers" of the original.<sup>193</sup>

Because of God's ultimate authorship, the deep ken understood that the canon was comprehensive, that it contained the answer to any question a reader could pose. Wycliffe had argued that "because God speaks all truth, it is evident that his saying it is the first cause of all external truth." Wycliffe noted that Jesus was the *proximus auctor* [proximate author] of canon, which was an expression of his *sententia* [intended meaning]. Because Jesus was supreme, canon was also supreme, *autentica* and *credenda* [authentic and to be believed]. Other writings might also be true, Wycliffe continued, but they were true only as long as they consonated with canon.<sup>194</sup> Noting the comprehensiveness of scripture for ecclesiastical governance, Gerson pointed out that an incomplete Bible would mean that Jesus would have been an "imperfect legislator."<sup>195</sup> This attitude echoed in Joan of Arc's comment that Jesus had a true canon, inaccessible to humans, that was fully comprehensive. When someone exulted that "Such deeds as you have done were never seen, their like is not to be read in any book," she explained that "My Lord has a book in which no scholar has read, how perfect soever he be in scholarship."<sup>196</sup>

The most interesting argument regarding canon comprehensiveness comes from Bernardino of Siena (1380–1444). One issue that puzzled Bernardino was why Jesus never explicitly criticized homosexuality. We might think of possible answers before turning to Bernardino. Maybe Jesus did not disapprove. Maybe he did disapprove, but never got around to condemning it. Maybe, thinking with the plain ken, his condemnation was lost in the manuscript tradition. In contrast, Bernardino knew that homosexuality was bad, and that Jesus condemned all bad things—that is, because canon was comprehensive,

192 Vrej Nersessian, *Treasures from the Ark: 1700 Years of Armenian Christian Art* (London: British Library, 2001), 69; Grigor Tatevatsi, *Oskep'orik* (n.p.: Tparani Abraham Dpri, 1746), 398.

193 Dmitrij Čiževskij, *History of Russian Literature* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), 178.

194 John Wycliffe, *De Veritate Sacrae Scripturae*, ed. Rudolf Buddensieg, 3 vols. (London: Trübner, 1905), I, 378; John Wycliffe, *Trialogus*, trans. Stephen Lahey (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2013), 190–94 (3.31); John Wycliffe, *Trialogus*, ed. Gotthard Lechler (Oxford: Clarendon, 1869), 238–43, esp. 239 (3.31). See Ian Christopher Levy, *Holy Scripture and the Quest for Authority at the End of the Middle Ages* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), 54–91.

195 Jean Gerson, "Sermo habitus Tarascone coram Benedicto XIII," in OC, V, 74.

196 Willard Trask, ed., *Joan of Arc in Her Own Words* (New York: Turtle Point, 1996), 59.

it must contain criticisms of all behaviours that ought to be criticized. These are his starting points. He was no plain-ken exclusivist, so he came up with an ingenious explanation, apparently taken from Jerome. The first Christmas Eve, every man inclined towards homosexuality dropped dead, out of respect. Thus, homosexuality did not exist during Jesus's life, and therefore there was nothing for him to condemn.<sup>197</sup> In a way, this is a kind of historicizing, using dogmas to conclude context, instead of vice versa.

Some deep-ken critics attacked plain-ken moves. Some complained about the Wycliffites' excess literalism: "Oh miserable Wycliffe! and miserable Wycliffites! who thus battle not for the meaning of divine Scripture, but for their own, that they desire it [their own meaning] to be the meaning of holy Scripture." That critic compared the Wycliffites to children who used Jesus's statement "I am the Alpha and the Omega" (Revelation 22:13) to conclude that he was the first letter and the last letter of the alphabet.<sup>198</sup> In Bohemia, more mainstream critics concluded that radicals who took literally Jesus's telling temple elders that "prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you" (Mt 21:31) would not welcome anyone into their sect who was not a sex worker, "not even the smallest little girl, who would have to be violated and fornicate with them if they were to accept her."<sup>199</sup> Such information was likely obtained under torture, and plain-ken historians today suspect its veracity, but it nonetheless illustrates a mainstream logic.<sup>200</sup>

## Envoi

The two kens normally coexisted in a single person's perspective. Wycliffe was happy to have the Bible translated into English (plain ken), but asserted that the tense of verbs in the Gospel had no relevance because their meaning was

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197 Bernardino, *Le prediche volgari*, ed. Ciro Cannarozzi, 3 vols. (Florence: Libreria Editrice Fiorentina, 1940), II, 278–79. A similar idea occurs in Antoninus of Florence, *Summa theologica* (Venice: Johannis de Colonia and Johannes Manthen de Gherretzem, 1477), fol. 203r and in Johannes Herolt, *Sermones Discipuli de tempore et de sanctis* (Strassburg: n.p., 1484), fol. 41rv. See Franco Mormando, *The Preacher's Demons: Bernardino of Siena and the Social Underworld of Early Renaissance Italy* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 127; Pietro Agostino d'Avack, "L'omosessualità nel Diritto Canonico," *Ulisse 7* (1953): 680–97. Bernardino also argued that a homosexual unrepentant at age thirty-three was beyond saving, a deep-ken reference to Jesus's lifespan on earth. See Mormando, *Preacher's Demons*, 146.

198 Thomas Netter, *De hæresibus antiquorum*, in *De Sacramentis*, ed. Bonaventura Blanciotti (Venice: Bassanesius, 1758), col. 236.

199 "Adamite Articles (ca. 1421)," in Martin Pjecha, ed., "Hussite Eschatological Texts (1412–1421): Introduction and Translations," in *Early Modern Prophecies in Transnational, National and Regional Contexts*, ed. Lionel Laborie and Ariel Hessayon (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 23–83 (82), [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004443631\\_003](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004443631_003)

200 Pjecha, ed., "Hussite Eschatological Texts," 34.

timeless (deep ken). Al-Islami used the Christian Old Testament in Hebrew, the language it was originally, historically written in, because he wanted to do numerological analysis of the Hebrew letters—a plain-ken approach to a deep-ken strategy. Abu 'Ubayda defended his plain-ken philological investigations by appeal to the deep ken: God's expression of the revelation in Arabic, with all its plain-ken imperfections, made that language perfect. Just as the Japanese *wabi-sabi* 侘寂 aesthetic values flaws, the deep ken can sometimes find value in plain-ken imperfection.

With the Renaissance we see a much clearer philological criticism, but one still sharply limited by theology and tradition. Scholars corrected and challenged, but still defended the Bible, and held off from making direct attacks on it. Perhaps they were being politic; perhaps their minds simply did not tend in such directions. History was the key to correction. Philology was a form of therapy, to restore texts.<sup>201</sup>

This entire process proved revolutionary. An interest in a literal sense of scripture allowed patriarchs and prophets to know about Jesus, because as historical figures they really did know about Jesus. This was a crucial step from a relatively free allegorical sense allowing the exegete a large and blank canvas, to the dominance of the historical and plain ken by 1800. In the later Late Traditional centuries, we next lose Mosaic authorship, and then Jesus's own position becomes imperilled. Once Alfonso de Madrigal and Savonarola acknowledge that the literal canon was verifiable, their intellectual descendants could question whether it was also falsifiable. History is doing something here, but the emphasis on the literal comes prior to and without historicization. As shifting to the literal gave interpreters less flexibility in working with difficult Old Testament passages, they were forced to discover new wiggle room in historical particularism, that idea that the writers' original historical context could affect interpretation in 1400. We also should remember the importance of the printing press's creating the possibility of accurate critical editions, translations, and commentaries.<sup>202</sup>

The plain ken need not be secular, nor atheistic. We have seen that God could intend for copyists to make errors. The Holy Ghost could guarantee that those errors were not significant. Even if Zechariah's *rex* does not literally refer to Jesus, that prophecy can still be inspired by God, and fulfilled by Jesus's riding a donkey into Jerusalem centuries later.

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201 Jacob, "Florida Verborum Venustas," 17.

202 Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1979), 329–67; Evans, *Language and Logic*, 43; Hauser and Watson, *A History of Biblical Interpretation*, 271.

Today, our modern perspective is massively, although not entirely, informed by the plain ken. Conversational English uses “literally” to mean “figuratively,” its exact opposite. A perfectly healthy speaker might claim to have “literally died last night.” This grates the plain-ken ear, but remember that from the deep-ken perspective Zechariah literally referred to Jesus five centuries in advance. Brahmins in ancient India and these English speakers today participate in a vision of language and truth that the plain ken, at best, dismisses as “poetry.”





## 12. Ways of Knowing

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In 1498, Florence was struggling with uncertainty. Its population held strong but opposing opinions on the righteousness of the influential Dominican friar Girolamo Savonarola (1452–98). A consensus gradually emerged around how to determine the truth of Savonarola’s claims to speak with the authority of Jesus. Because both sides’ deep ken saw a connection between truth and divine favour, they agreed that a Dominican and a Franciscan, one representing each side, would walk through a bonfire. If Savonarola was correct, God would preserve his stand-in’s life. A fiery twenty-five-metre gamut was prepared in the central square, and the rules were negotiated. Liturgical vestments, underwear, and genitals were inspected for possible enchantment. No crucifix could be carried into the flames, nor any consecrated hosts—although the two sides disagreed on whether flames could endanger the actual body of Jesus. Savonarola himself was made to watch from a distance, too far to cast protective spells. After hours of delay, a violent thunderstorm cut the proceedings short. Witnesses’ deep ken saw significance in storm, although no agreement emerged as to whether its origins were divine or diabolic.<sup>1</sup> Could there be an alternative to the search for certainty?

This chapter tells the story of how some members of the Jesus cult learned to stop worrying and embrace the probable. A messy plain-ken probabilism came to be an acceptable, and, subsequently, mainstream, answer to uncertainty. Admittedly, there were no philosophical knockouts, but we do see a palpable shift in the popularity and acceptance of the probable. This chapter also describes a particular plain-ken vision of history, a messy world of contingency that arose between what was necessarily true and what was impossible.

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1 Luca Landucci, *Diario fiorentino dal 1450 al 1516*, ed. Iodoco Del Badia (Florence: Sansoni, 1883), 168–69; Lauro Martines, *Fire in the City: Savonarola and the Struggle for Renaissance Florence* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006), 226–28; Joseph Schnitzer, *Savonarola und die Feuerprobe* (Munich: J. J. Lentner’schen, 1904).

## Bridget of Sweden and the Quest for Truth

Truth is the business of prophets. Dozens of times in the Gospels Jesus prefaces his own declarations with “amen,” or, in John, “amen amen.” In the Hebrew Bible, “amen” responds to a prophecy, blessing, or curse, to affirm that utterance’s truth: “It is true” or “May it be true.” The Hebrew word entered the Greek language and Bible, whence it entered the medieval Latin language and the Vulgate. The Wycliffe Bible translates that “amen” as “truly” (“treuli”). In the King James Version (1604–11), “amen” became “verily,” an iconic token of how many today imagine Jesus’s speech patterns. In modern vernacular English “really” can be a throw-away intensifying particle (“That’s really cool”), or, in the right context, with the right emphasis, can still serve as an assertion of truth (“He really said...”). My modern ears gloss over those “verily”s as a superficial decoration; traditional ears might have heard better.

Muhammad’s prophecy has an even more explicit sense of urgency for reliable signs and truths, especially in connection to Jesus’s life and teachings. The Qur’an insists that it creates no doubt, but instead clarifies meaning.<sup>2</sup> People of the Book are told not to “go to excess in your religion” by saying anything untrue about God, or by “overstepping the bonds of truth.”<sup>3</sup> Authenticity and genuineness are important. God will question even the truthful as to their sincerity.<sup>4</sup> The Qur’an promises woe to those who intentionally fabricate prophecy.<sup>5</sup> God sent Jesus not only with signs, but with “clear signs”<sup>6</sup>—but some say this is “clearly” sorcery.<sup>7</sup> The Qur’an goes into detail about the alleged death of Jesus: people who assert that Jesus had died “are full of doubt, with no knowledge to follow, only supposition: they certainly did not kill him.”<sup>8</sup> By the ninth century, Ahmad ibn Hanbal (780–855) had collected traditions explicitly remembering Jesus speaking in a similar way: he began a Jesus quotation with “In truth I say to you,” remarking parenthetically that Jesus “often used to say, ‘in truth I say to you.’”<sup>9</sup>

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2 “This is the Scripture in which there is no doubt, containing guidance for those who are mindful of God...” (Qur’an 2:2); “These are the verses of the Scripture, a Qur’an that makes things clear” (Qur’an 15:1).

3 Qur’an 4:171; 5:77.

4 Qur’an 33:8.

5 Qur’an 2:79.

6 Qur’an 2:87, 253; 43:63.

7 Qur’an 5:110; 61:6.

8 Qur’an 4:157.

9 Tarif Khalidi, ed., *The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2001), 70, 80 (Kh30, 51).

The search for truth is perennial, but has different nuances in varied times and places.

In thirteenth-century England, the jury system developed to deliberate and determine the truth of a legal accusation. The number of jurors on a jury fell from forty-eight (twelve times four) to the more efficient twelve. Their ability to discern truth depended in part on their number's deep-ken consonance with the number of Jesus's disciples.<sup>10</sup> In the Far West in 1400, jurors had a terror of making a mistaken judgment when in a state of doubt. They had many reasons to be fearful. First, it was unwise: the friends of the person you condemned might wage a vendetta against you. Second, it was illegal: both jurors and judges were liable for incorrect judgments. Most dangerously, it was a moral sin: spiritual consequences could hound someone who condemned another despite doubts; this was commonplace in moral theology well into the eighteenth century.<sup>11</sup>

In our period, a number of truth-seekers converged on the revelations of the mystic Bridget of Sweden (ca. 1303–73). Were they real? The canonization process poised to make her a saint raised the stakes. She had claimed a series of visions, experienced since childhood, which, translated into Latin, had become popular throughout the western Far West. In particular, artists valued the new information she could provide about the details of the Nativity. Even in depictions today a glowing Baby Jesus or a blonde Virgin might trace their origins to Bridget's vision that at Jesus's birth "such indescribable light and splendor went out from him that the sun could not be compared to it. The candle that the old man had placed there was giving no light at all, for that divine lustre completely outshone the material lustre of the candle" (see Chapter 14).<sup>12</sup> Her supporters in Italy argued that even "if the entire sacred scripture had been burned," the content of Bridget's revelations would "suffice for the reform of the Catholic faith."<sup>13</sup>

A number of extraordinary circumstances confirmed the truth of these revelations. Jesus had told Bridget that he approved of editorial work in support of the revelation: "I, God, cut words from the forest of my divinity and placed them in your heart. My friends edited and arranged them in books, colouring and adorning them according to the grace given them."<sup>14</sup> In another

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10 Norman F. Cantor, *Inventing the Middle Ages* (New York: William Morrow, 1991), 64.

11 James Q. Whitman, *The Origins of Reasonable Doubt* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2008), 10, 121.

12 Bridget of Sweden, *The Revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden*, trans. Denis Searby, ed. Bridget Morris, 4 vols. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006–15), III, 251 (book 7, chapter 21).

13 Codex Falkenbergianus, Lund University Library, MS 21, fol. 109v.

14 Bridget of Sweden, *Extravagant Revelations*, in *The Revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden*, trans. Searby, ed. Morris, IV, 219–317 (267) (ch. 49).

revelation, Jesus linked the pains of his Crucifixion to the death threats hurled against Bridget.<sup>15</sup> Throughout the 1370s, a number of critics of her revelations suffered ill health or went insane. Citing his own unworthiness, one of her confessors modestly refused to assist in writing down the revelations, until he was spiritually assaulted; his health returned when he agreed to help.<sup>16</sup> In the next century, Jesus personally assured Margery Kempe (ca. 1373–1438), herself distraught by the continuing debates over Bridget’s revelations, that “I tell you truly that every word that is written in Bridget’s book is true.”<sup>17</sup>

Not everyone was convinced. Henry of Langenstein (ca. 1325–97) expressed doubts in general about these kinds of revelation, and specifically about our ability to recognize them. Admittedly, such new revelations were possible, but they were rare, and many alleged visions were in fact caused by unrelated circumstantial factors, such as the visionaries’ physiological conditions or the heavens’ astronomical conditions.<sup>18</sup> He therefore opposed Bridget’s canonization. At Pisa in 1409, Cardinal Louis Aleman of Arles (ca. 1390–1450) pointed out the “perplexities and ineptitudes” of Bridget’s revelations and asked that everyone stop claiming that they were on the same level as the canon.<sup>19</sup>

Much of the debate was gendered. In the 1380s, an anonymous opponent in Perugia expressed his doubts: God was too great to appear to a woman—after all, Paul did not allow women to speak in church.<sup>20</sup> Many theologians, however, saw Bridget’s gender as no obstacle to the truth of her revelations, and even as rendering them all the more impressive. In his preface to her revelations Mathias of Linköping (ca. 1300–50) marvelled at how Jesus now spoke to a woman, necessarily by gender “the humble and meek in spirit.” Such an unexpected occurrence was more amazing (*stupendius*) than the Incarnation itself.<sup>21</sup> One sermon given at Vadstena (ca. 1410–40) argued that the world had aged so much that Jesus decided to speak to a woman and describe the Crucifixion in terms of

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15 Bridget, *Extravagant Revelations*, IV, 236 (ch. 8).

16 Claire L. Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2001), 137–38, 154–55.

17 Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, trans. B. A. Windeatt (London: Penguin, 1985), 83 (bk. 1, ch. 20).

18 Heinrich von Langenstein, *Unterscheidung der Geister*, ed. Thomas Hohmann (Munich: Artemis, 1977), 56–60.

19 “Sententia contra ordinem nostrum in concilio Basiliensi lata,” Uppsala, Universitetsbibliotek, C 31, fol. 31r–32r.

20 The Perugian also pointed out that the revelation’s language was too inelegant to be true. We know the Perugian’s criticisms through Easton’s repudiations. Adam Easton, *Defensorium sanctae Birgittae*, BodL MS Hamilton 7, fol. 229r–31v.

21 Mathias of Linköping, *Prologue*, in *The Revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden*, trans. Searby, ed. Morris, I, 47–52 (47).

birth pains.<sup>22</sup> The English Cardinal Adam Easton (ca. 1330–97) explained that women’s social and intellectual inferiority to men did not exclude the possibility of revelation to women. In fact, Jesus decided to choose a woman to demonstrate that he was not misogynist. This, Easton explained, was part of Jesus’s long-standing strategy to correct the misconception that he preferred male disciples (all twelve were men), a strategy that began when he appeared first to women after the Resurrection. The Gospels recounted Jesus’s revelation of his return to the women visiting his empty tomb, news that “exceeds the natural power of a human and only corresponds to infinite power.”<sup>23</sup> For Easton, Jesus’s revelation of his birth to the female Bridget was therefore easier to believe. Gender works in the plain ken as a kind of *lectio difficilior potior* (see Chapter 11): that Jesus chose the less likely gender makes the revelations more likely to be true.

Paris Chancellor Jean Gerson (1363–1429) took a particular interest in the truth of revelations, Bridget’s and others’. His understanding of truth could be strikingly different from our modern instincts. He remarked that just as a student of the theory of medicine would know more than a mere medical practitioner(!), just as a blind person would have greater cognitive abilities than one with sight(!), so too someone, like himself, who had never observed a mystical experience was better able to assess reports of a mystical experience.<sup>24</sup> Gerson weighed in with helpful questions for discernment: “To whom is the revelation? What does it contain and say? Why is it said to occur? [...] How and from where is it found to come?”<sup>25</sup> True revelation must be consistently true and go beyond what reason or canon already revealed. In a crucial move, Gerson believed that revelation would only happen to someone humble enough to obey the decisions of church officials.<sup>26</sup> In any case, recent revelation should not distract from canon.<sup>27</sup> Gerson compared the scholar assessing purported revelation to a money-changer: demons would attempt to fool the scholar with false accounts, like counterfeit “coins.” The money-changer would verify the precious metal in the coin by subjecting it to fire, just as the scholar would apply critical inquiry to a witness’s testimony. Where the money-changer awaited

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22 “*De sancta Byrgitta*,” Uppsala, Universitetsbibliotek, C 389, fol. 139r–141v.

23 BodL MS Hamilton 7, fol. 229v (art. 1, 10).

24 Jean Gerson, “*De theologia mystica lectiones sex*,” in OC, III, 255. The translation is from Brian Patrick McGuire, “On Mystical Theology: The First and Speculative Treatise [Extracts],” in *Jean Gerson: Early Works*, ed. McGuire (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), 262–87 (270–71). See Dyan Elliott, “Seeing Double: Jean Gerson, the Discernment of Spirits, and Joan of Arc,” *The American Historical Review* 107 (2002): 26–54.

25 Jean Gerson, “*De probatione spirituum*,” in OC, IX, 180.

26 Jean Gerson, “*De distinctione revelationum*,” in OC, III, 56.

27 Gerson, “*De probatione spirituum*,” 181–82.

strength and the correct colour, the scholar looked for patience and goodwill.<sup>28</sup> In the end, despite developing these guidelines for assessing revelation in general, Gerson drew no conclusions about Bridget's specific revelations. She was canonized in 1391.<sup>29</sup>

## The Challenges of Skepticism

Amidst these kinds of debates, a particularly reliable kind of truth held a particular attraction: by our period, Christian and Muslim scholars had both longed for something called "certainty." For them, certainty was an ideal, objective and infallible. It compelled agreement, and could never be proved false.<sup>30</sup> Bonaventure (1221–74) defined certainty as something that "cannot be resisted; to it a man is forced to assent, whether he wants to or not."<sup>31</sup> A key characteristic was that it was all-or-nothing. Just as language police today condemn "more unique" as illogical, these scholars knew that one could not be more certain, or less certain, or certain-ish. Nicholas of Autrecourt (d. 1369) noted that when faced with two "certain" conclusions, "we are no more certain of one than of the other."<sup>32</sup> His contemporary Nicole Oresme (ca. 1320/25–82) made a similar point.<sup>33</sup>

This appreciation for certainty was tempered by an awareness of the difficulty—or even impossibility—of achieving it. While today a "skeptic" might be certain that some assertions could not be true, traditional skepticism was uncertain about everything. The Abrahamic religions had their own native appreciation of uncertainty, further compounded when the Indian tradition of skepticism was imported into the Far West by Alexander the Great's entourage. The Talmud urged care in jurisprudence: imagine chasing two men round a corner, to find one dead and the other with "sword in hand with blood dripping from it." Even in such an obvious case of guilt, it warns, "If this is what ye saw,

28 Gerson, "De distinctione revelationum," 38–40.

29 Sahlín, *Birgitta of Sweden*, 164–69.

30 Ilkka Kantola, *Probability and Moral Uncertainty in Late Medieval and Early Modern Times* (Helsinki: Luther-Agricola Society, 1994), 15–19.

31 Bonaventure, *Commentarius in Evangelium Ioannis*, in *Opera Omnia*, ed. Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 9 vols. (Florence: Quaracchi, 1893), VI, 243.

32 Nicholas of Autrecourt, *His Correspondence with Master Giles and Bernard of Arezzo*, ed. L. M. de Rijk (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 61.

33 Nicolai Oresme, *Expositio et quaestiones in Aristotelis De anima*, ed. Benoît Patar (Leuven: Peeters, 1995), 437 (book 3, question 16). For similar thinking in al-Ghazali, see Farid Jabre, *La notion de certitude selon Ghazali dans ses origines psychologiques et historiques* (Paris: Vrin, 1958), 439. See also Robert Pasnau, *After Certainty: A History of our Epistemic Ideals and Illusions* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2017), 21–45, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198801788.001.0001>

ye saw nothing."<sup>34</sup> The standards for certainty were high, and the obstacles obvious. In our period, Jalal-al-Din al-Suyuti (1445–1505) poetically described the inaccessibility of true knowledge, which he compared to “a turbulent ocean the floor of which cannot be reached” or to “a lofty mountain the summit of which cannot be scaled or approached.”<sup>35</sup>

Skeptical scholars saw value in critical attacks on the illusion of certainty. Al-Ghazali (ca. 1058–1111) reflected on a book he left at home before going out, and was skeptical about his ability to know its present state with certainty: “I do not know what is at the house at present. All I know is that I have left a book in the house, which is perhaps now a horse that has defiled the library with its urine and its dung...”<sup>36</sup> Peter Abelard (ca. 1079–1142) prized doubt as the origin of investigation, itself the origin of truth.<sup>37</sup> A contemporary described Ibn Khaldun’s “love of being contrary in everything” that left him always doubting the truth of things.<sup>38</sup>

In particular, a long-standing anti-intellectual tradition cast doubts on the power of logic. Gregory of Nazianzus (d. 390) warned a debate partner that too much intellectualizing would “make us both go insane for casting our eyes into the mysteries of God.”<sup>39</sup> The poet Oswald von Wolkenstein (1376/77–1445) sang of his reason being “sick.”<sup>40</sup> Martin Luther (1483–1546) referred to reason as the “wife” or the “whore” of the devil.<sup>41</sup>

If logic itself was unreliable, how could one escape the quicksand of skepticism? One traditional escape route was to bring skepticism to bear against skepticism. The chronicler Ranulf Higden (ca. 1280–1364) quoted Jerome (d. 420): “You will find many incredible and unlikely [*non versimilia*] things which nonetheless are true. For nothing of nature is contrary to the Lord.” For that

34 *The Babylonian Talmud*, ed. I. Epstein, 4 vols. (London: Soncino, 1935), I, 235 (57b).

35 Al-Suyuti, *The Perfect Guide to the Sciences of the Qur’an*, trans. Hamid Algar (Reading: Garnet, 2011), xix (his own introduction).

36 Al-Ghazali, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, trans. Michael E. Marmura (Provo: Brigham Young UP, 1997), 174.

37 Peter Aberlard, *Sic et non*, in *Opera Omnia*, in *Patrologia Latina*, ed. J.-P. Migne, 217 vols. (Paris: Garnier, 1855), CLXXVII, col. 1349 (prologue).

38 This is the Egyptian scholar Al-Sakhawi (d. 1497), quoted in Franz Rosenthal, “Ibn Khaldun in his Time,” *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 18 (1983): 166–78 (168).

39 Gregory of Nazianzus, “Theologica quinta: De Spiritu Sancto,” in *Opera quæ exstant omnia II*, in *Patrologia Graeca*, ed. J.-P. Migne, 161 vols. (Paris: Migne, 1858), XXXVI, col. 142.

40 Oswald von Wolkenstein, *The Poems of Oswald von Wolkenstein*, trans. Albrecht Classen (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 58–59.

41 Martin Luther, “Wider die himmlischen Propheten, 2. Teil,” in *D. Martin Luthers Werke: kritische Gesamtausgabe*, 127 vols. (Weimar: Böhlau, 1883–2009), XVIII, 164 and “Predigt am 18. Sonntag nach Trinitatis,” in *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, XXXIV, part 2, 313.



reason, we should be skeptical about skepticism about miracles. Maybe they do happen.<sup>42</sup> Such pure skeptics could, in theory, live a happy life of passionless *apatheia*, unburden by false certainties, to the irritation of other philosophers.

Other scholars developed three new escapes from skepticism, two through Jesus, one through probability.

## Jesus as an Escape from Skepticism

### Logic and Foolishness

The first escape was to find in Jesus and his religion the compelling certainty they sought. Nicholas of Autrecourt addressed his remarks to an extreme skeptic who does “not know if you are in the sky or on earth,” or if the “pope exists,” or “whether you have a head.” Such a stance would lead to anarchy, because the unreliability of witnesses’ testimony would “lead to the destruction of civilian and political life.” His ultimate way out was to reason that skepticism would have prevented Jesus’s disciples from being certain that Jesus died and rose from the dead. Because that would be impossible, because Jesus’s life must be certainly known by its witnesses, skepticism was defeated.<sup>43</sup>

Giovanni Francesco Pico della Mirandola (1470–1533) pursued a similar approach. His 1520 *Examen vanitatis* [Examination of Vanity] drew on the ancient Greek skeptic Sextus Empiricus (fl. ca. 150) to deny any certainty to Aristotle (384–322 BC) and the “invented knowledge” of the Greeks, or to reason more generally. Giovanni Pico, however, had access through Jesus to knowledge that *was* obvious and compelling: God’s revelations. Indeed, Giovanni Pico was upset that the Jews could not see something as clear as the sun: “Why do you wait for the sun, you blind ones? The sun is here and shines, but it shines in darkness, and your darkness does not comprehend it.” What was that sun? Giovanni Pico had in mind the Genesis (1:16) account of the creation of the sun, which his deep ken identified with Jesus. Thus, we could “prove the same thing through the similarity of metaphor,” for just as “the sun did not destroy the firmament, but perfected it,” so too “Christ came not to destroy the law, but perfect it.”<sup>44</sup>

42 Ranulf Higden, *Polychronicon Ranulphi Higden*, ed. Churchill Babington, 9 vols. (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, and Green, 1865–86), I, 16.

43 Nicholas of Autrecourt, “Nicholas of Autrecourt on Skepticism about Substance and Causality,” in *Medieval Philosophy: Essential Readings with Commentary*, ed. Gyula Klima, Fritz Allhoff, and Anand Jayprakash Vaidya (Oxford: Blackwell: 2007), 134–42 (136).

44 Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Heptaplus*, in *On the Dignity of Man, On Being and the One, Heptaplus*, trans. Douglas Carmichael (New York: Bobbs-Merril, 1965),

Other contemporary thinkers used the brilliance of the sun as a metaphor for undeniable knowledge, and often associated that light with Jesus. The 1491 *Schatzbehalter* [Treasury], composed by the Franciscan preacher Stephan Fridolin (d. 1498), identified Jesus as the way beyond skepticism; his humanity was a “remedy by which the blind were given the light as well as a lesson to make the ones who see understand the truth.”<sup>45</sup> Johannes Oecolampadius (d. 1531) wrote that Jesus’s disciples saw “clearer than the noon sun, that all is vanity, vanity those things under the sun...”<sup>46</sup>

At the end of our period, Desiderius Erasmus (1466–1536), praising folly, emphasized the otherworldly “foolishness” of the Christian dispensation, and Jesus’s selection of non-intellectual audiences. Erasmus quoted Jesus talking to his Father in the Psalms (69:5): “Thou knowest my foolishness.” Noting that in Greek the words for “child” and “wise” were opposite, Erasmus underlined Jesus’s pleasure in revelation to children being hidden from the wise (Mt 11:25, Lk 10:21). Jesus “took special delight in little children, women, and fishermen, while the dumb animals who gave him the greatest pleasure were those furthest removed from cleverness and cunning.” Although Jesus could have ridden a lion without danger, instead he chose a donkey. Jesus referred to his followers as “sheep” (Mt 25:32–3, Jn 10), an animal Erasmus maligned as maximally stupid. The personified Folly says that Jesus became “something of a fool himself in order to help the folly of mankind, when he assumed the nature of man” and subsequently saved mankind “by the folly of the cross (1 Cor. 1:21) and through his simple, ignorant apostles, to whom he unfailingly preached folly.” His teachings encouraged followers to rely on him rather than on their own intelligence.<sup>47</sup> Even in his preface to his New Testament, Erasmus linked Jesus, god made man, to the kind of wisdom “that will render foolish the wisdom of this world.”<sup>48</sup>

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63–174 (157, 163). He is alluding to Mt 5:17 and Jn 1:5. See Brian Ogren, “The Forty-Nine Gates of Wisdom as Forty-Nine Ways to Christ: Giovanni Pico della Mirandola’s Heptaplus and Nahmanidean Kabbalah,” *Rinascimento* 49 (2009): 27–43.

45 Stephan Fridolin, *Schatzbehalter* (Nuremberg: Anton Koberger, 1491), fol. a2r. Translation from Almut Breitenbach and Stefan Matter, “Image, Text, and Mind: Franciscan Tertiaries Rewriting Stephan Fridolin’s *Schatzbehalter* in the Pütrichkloster in Munich,” in *Nuns’ Literacies in Medieval Europe: The Antwerp Dialogue*, ed. Virginia Blanton, Veronica O’Mara, and Patricia Stoop (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017), 297–316 (297–99).

46 Oecolampadius, *De Risu Paschali* (Basel: Frobenius, 1518), 22.

47 Erasmus, “Praise of Folly,” in *A Complaint of Peace*, trans. Betty Radice, CWE 27, 147–48.

48 Erasmus, “Paraclesis,” in *Opera Omnia*, ed. Jean Leclerc, 10 vols. (Leiden: Lugduni Batavorum Vander, 1703–06), VI.

Similarly, in Florence, Savonarola explained that Jesus “wanted, through the foolishness of the cross, that men be wise; thus leave behind, O wise men, human wisdom; come to the foolishness of Christ, to the foolishness of the cross, which is the true wisdom [...] although to you it seems madness.”<sup>49</sup> The Florentine poet Girolamo Benivieni (1453–1542) composed a song, “Non fu mai el più bel solazzo” [Never was there more beautiful solace], which understood going insane for love for Jesus as the “most beautiful solace”:

Come pazzo ogn’huom gridando  
 IESV mio la croce prenda  
 Ognun gridi com’io grido  
 sempre pazzo pazzo pazzo

Like crazy each man crying  
 [may] my Jesus take up the cross  
 Let each cry as I cry,  
 always crazy crazy crazy.<sup>50</sup>

## Prayer and Silence

The more radical Jesus-centred escape route from skepticism was to respond to thoughts of doubt by not thinking.<sup>51</sup>

Constantinople and its Patriarch were under siege—but he had a plan. In 1397, during his few months as patriarch, Callistus II Xanthopoulos (d. ca. 1397) breathed carefully some four million times, usually with his mouth shut, and his mind in his nostrils. Why?

The patriarch’s passion was hesychasm (ἡσυχασμός, “stillness”), the dwelling in God’s silence through the practice of continuous prayer. Callistus was particularly fond of the prayer method of the thirteenth-century Nikephoros, an “Italian”—maybe a Greek from Calabria—monk of Athos

49 Savonarola, “Sermon of April 13, 1491,” in *Prediche sopra Giobbe, Volume 2*, ed. Roberto Ridolfi (Rome: A. Belardetti, 1955–74), 280.

50 Girolamo Benivieni, *Opere* (Venice: n.p., 1535), 143r–45r. For music, see Patrick Macey, *Bonfire Songs: Savonarola’s Musical Legacy* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), 83–85.

51 John Breck, *Scripture in Tradition: The Bible and Its Interpretation in the Orthodox Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary, 2001), 211–18; Dirk Krausmüller, “The Rise of Hesychasm,” in *Eastern Christianity*, ed. Michael Angold, Cambridge History of Christianity 5 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2006), 101–26; Kallistos Ware, “St. Nikodimos and the Philokalia,” in *Mount Athos, the Sacred Bridge: The Spirituality of the Holy Mountain*, ed. Dimitri Conomos and Graham Speake (Bern: Peter Lang, 2005), 69–122.

who wrote a treatise *On Guarding the Heart* a century before.<sup>52</sup> Nikephoros anticipated that his method could be widely used: he promised an easy, non-demonic way whereby even you, even if you were not naturally inclined towards mystic visions, could experience the divine: “Sit down, recollect your mind, draw it—I am speaking of your mind—in your nostrils; that is the path the breath takes to reach the heart. Drive it, force it to go down to your heart with the air you are breathing in. When it is there, you will see the joy that follows...” The patriarch was not following Nikephoros’s straightforward instructions for the mere pleasure, and it was a pleasure, of forcing his mind through his nostrils. That was only preparation, as Nikephoros’s instructions explained: “Next you must know that as long as your spirit (νοῦς *nous*) abides there, you must not remain silent nor idle. Have no other occupation or meditation than the cry of ‘Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me!’ [Κύριε Ἰησοῦ Χριστέ, Ἰεὶ τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἐλέησόν με]. Under no circumstances give yourself any rest.”<sup>53</sup> He urged his students to not rely on discretion to sort out thoughts, but exclude thoughts entirely for the sake of prayer.<sup>54</sup> This was easier than it sounded: Nikephoros wrote that reading his guide, even a part of his guide, obviated the need for a teacher, even for beginners. In the treatise he wrote with his friend Ignatius, Patriarch Callistus improved this method with a suggestion of his own, to pray with the mouth closed.<sup>55</sup>

This was a kind of liberation technology. The hesychasts struggled against, and transcended over, the eight kinds of disordered thoughts (λογισμοί *logismoi*), which could become rooted as passions—to develop passionlessness (ἀπάθεια *apatheia*), to recover the unity of their own intellects with God, who created them. In contrast, their intellectualist opponents made much of the distinction between rational humans and non-rational animals and herded the hesychasts with the latter.<sup>56</sup> At Athos, the aristocrat Gregory Palamas (1296–1359), a Nikephoros disciple, successfully defended hesychasm in a series of

52 Nikephoros the Monk, *On Sobriety and the Guarding of the Heart*, in *Patrologia Graeca*, ed. Migne, CXLVII, 945–66; Antonio Rigo, “Niceforo l’escicasta (XIII sec.): alcune considerazioni sulla vita e sull’opera,” in *L’amore del bello, studi sulla Filocalia*, ed. Tomáš Špidlík (Magnano: Qiqajon, 1991), 79–119.

53 E. Kadloubovsky and G. E. H. Palmer, trans., *Writings from the Philokalia on Prayer of the Heart* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), 32–34; Nikephoros, *On Sobriety*, 961–66.

54 Nikephoros, *On Sobriety*, 964–65.

55 John Meyendorff, *St. Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality*, trans. Adele Fiske (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminar, 1974), 128–29.

56 Gregory the Sinaite, *Discourse on the Transfiguration*, trans. David Balfour (San Bernardino, CA: Borgo, 1990). The Gregories agree that, in Krausmüller’s words, “the human faculty for analytical thought can only be saved if it is never activated.” Krausmüller, “The Rise of Hesychasm,” 99, 109, 113–16, 122; Kallistos

church meetings, in part by misrepresenting its opponents as promoting thought above prayer. Considering knowledge with a plain-ken critical eye, Gregory condemned it as a “profane wisdom,” probably promoted by demons, that merely creates “an unstable and easily modified opinion.”<sup>57</sup> If the intellectuals’ knowledge was knowledge, then only the ignorant would be saved, for, as he explained, “Any word may contest with another word, but what is the word that can contest with life?”<sup>58</sup> The Jesus prayer was better than the mental proliferation of demons and intellectuals. Gregory evoked a “supra-rational knowledge” that “is common to all those who have believed in Christ ... they will be light, and they will see light...”<sup>59</sup> After a series of council debates, Gregory became Archbishop of Thessalonica, and the Constantinople patriarchate was held by a series of hesychasts, up to and including our Callistus in 1397.

One Gregory, Palamas, won the day for hesychasm, and another spread it across the Orthodox world. Encountering the practice at Crete before moving to Athos, Gregory of Sinai (1255–1346) took up Nikephoros’s version in particular, although his fears of demonic interference motivated him to include cautionary warnings against attempting this without expert supervision.<sup>60</sup> He condemned intellectuals who opened their rational faculty to corruption from those disordered *logismoi*. What they called Reason was merely a mess of thoughts, inspired by sense perceptions and by demons. The hesychasts, in contrast, had through hesychasm restored their prelapsarian rationality, as long as one did not think in ways called “rational.” Rational thinking only worked by avoiding Reason. Real knowledge, he advised, comes from neither cognition and proofs, but from the grace through hesychasm,<sup>61</sup> specifically the “continuous invocation

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Ware, “The Jesus Prayer in St. Gregory of Sinai,” *Eastern Churches Review* 4 (1972): 3–22.

- 57 Grégoire Palamas, *Défense des saints hésychastes*, ed. Jean Meyendorff, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Louvain: Spicilegium Sacrum Lovaniense, 1973), 27–31 (1.1.9), 242–45 (2.1.9).
- 58 Quoted in Serafim Joantă, *Treasures of Romanian Christianity: Hesychast Tradition and Culture* (Bérgrolles-En-Mauges: CreateSpace, 2013), xxi.
- 59 Palamas, *Défense des saints hésychastes*, 524–27 (2.3.66). See Krausmüller, “The Rise of Hesychasm,” 116–23; Robert E. Sinckewicz, “Gregory Palamas,” in *La théologie byzantine et sa tradition*, ed. Carlo Giuseppe Conticello and Vassa Conticello, 2 vols. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2002), II, 131–37; Rudolf S. Stefec, “Mitteilungen aus Athos-Handschriften,” *Wiener Studien* 127 (2014): 121–50, <https://doi.org/10.1553/wst127s121>; John Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas*, trans. George Lawrence (London: The Faith Press, 1964).
- 60 Gregory of Sinai, “De errore, ubi et de multis materiis,” in Gregory of Palamas, *Opera Omnia*, in *Patrologia Graeca*, ed. Migne, CL, col. 1337–42.
- 61 Gregory of Sinai, “Capita valde utilia per acrostichidem,” in Gregory of Palamas, *Opera Omnia*, in *Patrologia Graeca*, ed. Migne, CL, col. 1240.

of the name of Jesus.”<sup>62</sup> There should be no room for disordered thoughts in your heart, which should be full only of the thought of Jesus.

Through Gregory of Sinai’s prayer manuals and many disciples, hesychasm then began to spread throughout the Slavic countries. Bulgarian and Serbian monks translated large numbers of hesychastic texts in the fourteenth century, and an anthology of them, the *Philokalia*, was translated into Romanian or Slavonic in 1382. In Romania, Nicodemus of Tismana (ca. 1320–1406) reformed monasteries to support hesychasm. Maybe Greek, Nicodemus had trained at Athos, and declined offers from Prince Lazar of leadership of the Serbian Church or of the leadership of the Serbs at Athos, instead preferring a career of monastery building in Wallachia and Transylvania (Tismana, Prislop, Vodița, Șaina, Vratna, Monastirica), which concluded in a semi-retirement where he spent weekends in communal prayer at Tismana and weekdays in a nearby cave practicing hesychasm, until he died.<sup>63</sup>

Russia was the farthest frontier of hesychasm. The Russians, lacking the inconvenient deserts that facilitated prayer, pragmatically found an equivalent inconvenience in their vast northern forests. Sergius of Radonezh (1315–92) founded a monastery Lavra of the Holy Trinity, the library of which housed many hesychastic manuscripts, some by Gregory of Sinai, some copied by Sergius himself.<sup>64</sup> The fall of Bulgaria to the Ottomans in the 1390s encouraged a wave of refugee religious fleeing into Russia, and they brought hesychastic ideas with them.<sup>65</sup> Others coming from Athos renewed enthusiasm for hesychasm in Russia through the century. A disciple of Sergius, Nilus of Sora (ca. 1443–1508) had picked up hesychasm on a journey through Palestine and Athos, and returned to Russia to establish a hermitage skete on the Sora River (whence his name) in northern Russia, ten miles from the Kirillo-Belozersky Monastery.

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62 Gregory of Sinai, “Accurata Dissertatio de Quiete et Oratione,” in Gregory of Palamas, *Opera Omnia*, in *Patrologia Graeca*, ed. Migne, CL, col. 1308.

63 Joantă, *Treasures*, xiv, 45–49, 68–71, 77, 88.

64 Epiphanius the Wise, “The Life, Acts and Miracles of Our Revered and Holy Father Abbot Sergius,” in *A Treasury of Russian Spirituality*, ed. George P. Fedotov (Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1969), 54–84. See Pierre Kovalevsky, *Saint Sergius and Russian Spirituality*, trans. W. Elias Jones (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1976); Kallistos Ware, *Act Out of Stillness: The Influence of Fourteenth-Century Hesychasm on Byzantine and Slav Civilization* (Toronto: Hellenic Canadian Association of Constantinople and the Thessalonikean Society of Metro Toronto, 1995), 20–23.

65 John V. A. Fine, Jr., *The Late Medieval Balkans* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 444–45.

Educated and ascetic, Nilus was the last major hesychast in Russia, and was on the losing side at their showdown at the Council of Moscow in 1503.<sup>66</sup>

## Probability as an Escape from Skepticism

The third escape from skepticism was to abandon the quest for certainty, to settle for apparent knowledge that was good enough. Unlike the first two escapes, this did not originate in Jesus, but it became the most widespread and enduring, and found many applications to Jesus-related problems.

Scholars largely accepted Aristotle's assertion that different fields or disciplines of knowledge had different possibilities of truth and certainty. "Precision," Aristotle advised, was "not to be sought for alike in all discussions." Indeed, a learned person should "look for precision in each class of things just so far as the nature of the subject admits." Some subjects involved matters, premises, and conclusions that were, at best, "for the most part true." In those subjects it would be "foolish" to "demand [...] demonstrative proofs."<sup>67</sup> Thomas Aquinas (1225–74), who knew and cited this passage from Aristotle, popularized a basic division between two kinds of knowledge, *scientia* and *opinio*. In the realm of necessary, timeless, philosophical truths—the deep ken—*scientia* involved demonstrations of certainty that compelled agreement. In the realm of unstable, contingent appearances—the plain ken—*opinio* involved rhetorical strategies designed to exploit the biases of a human audience.<sup>68</sup> Oresme continued this tradition of different fields requiring different criteria: demonstrations of certainty could occur in mathematics, but not in more human fields like ethics.<sup>69</sup>

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- 66 Fedotov, ed., *Treasury*, 100–01; David M. Goldfrank, "Burn, Baby, Burn: Popular Culture and Heresy in Late Medieval Russia," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 31.4 (1998): 17–32; David M. Goldfrank, "Recentring Nil Sorskii: The Evidence from the Sources," *Russian Review* 66 (2007): 359–76, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9434.2007.00448.x>; George A. Maloney, ed. and trans., *Nil Sorsky: The Complete Writings* (Mahwah: Christian Press, 2003); George A. Maloney, *Russian Hesychasm: The Spirituality of Nil Sorskij* (Paris: Mouton, 1973).
- 67 Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. David Ross (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998), 4 (1.3 1094b).
- 68 Ian Hacking, *The Emergence of Probability* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2006), 20–22, <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511817557>. This tradition may have been a mistranslation. The *Ethics* talks of *akribes*, which scholars now describe as precision, but was originally (1240s) translated into Latin as *certum* [that which is fixed]. See Pasnau, *After Certainty*, 31.
- 69 Nicole Oresme, *De proportionibus proportionum and Ad pauca respicientes*, ed. Edward Grant (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1966), 247–55; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologica*, II–II, q. 70, art. 2. See James Franklin, *The Science of Conjecture: Evidence and Probability Before Pascal* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins, 2001), 140–45.

Pierre d'Ailly (1351–1420) saw this attention to the field of knowledge as the solution to the desire to be certain and the skeptical recognition of certainty's elusiveness.<sup>70</sup> The influential Antoninus of Florence (1389–1459) asserted that in “moral matters, what is required is not the certitude of evidence but rather probable conjecture.”<sup>71</sup> In our period, scholarly interest generally shifted from *scientia* to *opinio*, not only in theology, ethics, and law, but in the study of the natural (medical) and social (economic) worlds. This shift was not limited to Christian scholarship: Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalani (1372–1449) did a meta-analysis of Qur’an studies, and realized that those scholars adopted their tools for evaluating canonical interpretations from the methodology of the field of jurisprudence.<sup>72</sup>

### Traditions of Probability

Without recourse to certainty, these messier fields of knowledge sought a kind of truth conceptualized as probability. Our modern “probable” means “likely to happen.” In the period under study, probability was very different. The English word comes from the Latin *probare*, to approve, which suggests the traditional meaning: a belief is probable if the proper authorities approve of it. One proves a belief by marshalling the favourable opinions of experts. Indeed, “provable,” an etymological cousin of “probable,” also descends from *probare*. Again, this concept goes back to Aristotle.<sup>73</sup> In this traditional view, probability and truth were independent of each other. This understanding continued into the

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70 Dominik Perler, *Zweifel and Gewissheit: skeptische Debatten im Mittelalter* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2013), 188–89.

71 Antoninus of Florence, *Summa theologica* (Venice: Marinus Saracenus, 1487), fol. 53v, 55v, 56r. The language at 53v conforms to that of Johannes Nider. It is not clear who was drawing from whom, or whether both were coming from a common source, perhaps Bernard of Clairvaux. See Johannes Nider, *Die vierundzwanzig goldenen Harfen*, ed. Stefan Abel (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 480. Nider used the concept of probability when writing on business ethics, e.g., *De contractibus mercatorum* (Cologne: Konrad Winters, ca. 1479).

72 Alexander Fidora, “Divination and Scientific Prediction: The Epistemology of Prognostic Sciences in Medieval Europe,” *Early Science and Medicine* 18 (2013): 517–35, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15733823-0186p0002>; Pasnau, *After Certainty*, 31. Al-Asqalani quoted in Franz Rosenthal, “Ibn Khaldun in his Time,” *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 18 (1983): 166–78 (169), <https://doi.org/10.1177/002190968301800303>

73 Aristotle, *Topics: Books I and VIII, with Excerpts from Related Texts*, trans. Robin Smith (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997), 1–2 (1.1; 100a–01a). The Greek here is ἐνδοξα, although other Greek terms and concepts are translated into Latin as *probabilia*.



eighteenth century, when the historian Edward Gibbon described one claim as “probable but undoubtedly false.”<sup>74</sup>

Boethius (ca. 480–524) shared an example of a probable statement: “If she is a mother, she loves her child.” This probability had nothing to do with the number of loving mothers as a percentage of the total number of mothers, as modern probability would. This probability did not deny that some mothers might not love their children. Rather, the statement was probable because most reasonable people would accept it; it resonated with the wise.<sup>75</sup>

This Aristotelian understanding of probability developed in the medieval Muslim and Christian worlds. Islamic scholars for centuries had assessed the strength of specific traditions, based on comparing reported evidence and recognizing the possibility, but unlikelihood, of multiple apparently independent witnesses coordinating their deceit.<sup>76</sup> John of Salisbury (d. 1180) followed the usage of Aristotle: “Probable logic [*logica probabilis*] is concerned with propositions which, to all or to many men, or at least to the wise, seem to be valid.”<sup>77</sup> In practice, the qualification of seeming valid to “the wise” faded. Individual scholars, implicitly considering themselves wise, held something to be probable if it seemed, in their eyes, to be valid.

Such a low bar could sometimes be applied to something as loft as certainty. Aquinas and Bonaventure could both speak of a “probable certainty.”<sup>78</sup> This functioned like certainty—one could take action based on it—but was merely probable. Aquinas, for example, noted that in the messy human world certainty (that is, knowledge demonstrative and infallible) was impossible. A certain conclusion could not be derived from uncertain premises. One could not have certain knowledge of what was contingent, non-necessary, and accidental. Consider, he proposed, a situation in which three witnesses’ testimonies agreed. We could not be *certain* that this is true, but we pragmatically accept that it was, because their possible collusion was only possible, not probable. Where

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74 Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 4 vols. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1850), II, 511.

75 The example originates from Cicero (Cic. Inv. 1.46), and was repeated and popularized by Boethius. Boethius, *De topicis differentiis*, trans. Eleonore Stump (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1978), 40.

76 Franklin, *Science of Conjecture*, 121.

77 John of Salisbury, *The Metalogicon of John of Salisbury*, trans. Daniel D. McGarry (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1955), 79 (2.3).

78 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologica*, II–II, q. 70, art. 2. See also Thomas Aquinas, *In libros posteriorum Analyticorum expositio*, book 1, lecture 16 and Bonaventure, *Commentaria in quatuor libros sententiarum II*, in *Opera omnia*, 4 vols. (Florence: Quaracchi, 1885), II, 136 (dist. 4, art. 2, quaest. 1).

a deep-ken logic sought certainty, the plain ken accepted probability. Aquinas concluded that “probability is sufficient.”<sup>79</sup>

Moving into our period, we see the idea of the “probable” thriving even beyond theology. Jean Buridan (d. ca. 1360) argued that a judge could “well and meritoriously [*bene et meritorie*]” execute an innocent person when “testimony and other legal evidence” showed that “this good man [...] was an evil murderer.”<sup>80</sup> This was not a compelling truth, but a justified one. Ranulf Higden considered the assertion that snakes had never inhabited Ireland as being *probabilius* [more probable], which his translator John Trevisa (d. 1402) expansively rendered “more probable and more skilful.”<sup>81</sup> Note that both men used the comparative degree, which would have been impossible for certainty, and Trevisa linked probability to skill, namely the ability to find supportive authorities. The imperial ambassador Thomas Ebendorfer (1388–1464) reasoned out that two contradictory statements could both be judged *probabilis* by the same person, as long as each was supported by a party of equally learned scholars. In such cases a new council, or something like it, would have to be called to resolve the issue.<sup>82</sup> Nicholas of Autrecourt argued for a blanket assertion: “It is probable that every thing which appears to be is, and that every thing which appears to be true is true.”<sup>83</sup>

The French Cardinal Pierre d’Ailly applied the concept of probability to astrology. One could interpret stars more reliably than one could interpret Biblical prophecy. Even Jesus was influenced by astrology except under exceptional circumstances, “by special privilege, not by nature but rather by grace.” He argued that “Christian tradition does not require Jesus’s birth to be exempt from astrological influence, just as it does not require Mary to be unable to be warmed by the sun’s light.” Jesus’s direction (Mt 5:17) to “not think that I have come to abolish the Law” applied to astrological law just as much as to

79 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologica*, I-II, q. 105, art. 2 (reply to obj. 8).

80 John Buridan, *In Metaphysicen Aristotelis quaestiones* (Paris: Badius, 1518), fol. 9r (2.1); translation by John Buridan, “John Buridan on Scientific Knowledge,” in *Medieval Philosophy: Essential Readings with Commentary*, ed. Gyula Klima, Fritz Allhoff, and Anand Jayprakash Vaidya (Malden: Blackwell, 2007), 143–50 (146).

81 *Polychronicon Ranulphi Higden*, I, 338–39. One manuscript has *probabile* instead of *probabilius*.

82 Thomas Ebendorfer, “Denkschrift des Thomas Ebendorfer, Gesandten K. Friedrichs III., über die Notwendigkeit der Berufung eines dritten Konzils,” in *Deutsche Reichstagsakten*, ed. Hermann Herre, 12 vols. (Gotha: Perthes, 1914), XV, 803. See Thomas Woelki, *Lodovico Pontano (ca. 1409–1439)* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 195–96, <https://doi.org/10.1163/ej.9789004194717.i-936>

83 Nicholas of Autrecourt, *Tractatus utilis ad videndum an sermones peripateticorum fuerint demonstrativi*, in J. Reginald O’Donnell, ed., “Nicholas of Autrecourt,” *Mediaeval Studies* 1 (1939): 179–280 (228–29) (ch. 6).

Mosaic law.<sup>84</sup> D'Ailly predicted religious revolutions in 1789 and 1915.<sup>85</sup> (The French Revolution and World War One were, in fact, the great disasters for Christianity from a traditional view.) He was cautious: revolution would not occur if the world had ended first, an event the time of which only God knew. The stars also could not explain the nature of revolution; it was the Bible that clarified this as the advent of the Antichrist.<sup>86</sup> Because God could act absolutely, we have to remain skeptical about even the clearest astronomical predictions, because he could, theoretically, defy them.<sup>87</sup>

### Gerson's Popularization of Probability

This traditional idea of "sufficient probability" was popularized by d'Ailly's student Gerson, in both his 1418 *De consolatione theologiae* [On the Consolation of Theology]<sup>88</sup> and in his consideration of the case of Joan of Arc (ca. 1412–31). Gerson drew from this same Aristotelian tradition of distinguishing between the kinds of knowledge involved in mathematics and those involved in morals.

Gerson approached truth pragmatically. The truth of a book describing the visions of Ermine of Reims (d. 1396) was irrelevant, he argued, since either way it should not be publicized. Gerson quoted Jesus's instructions, "Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs" (Mt 7:6).<sup>89</sup> Even if authorities confirmed the belief that one could not die on the same day as hearing mass, one should not popularize it widely, especially given its track record of being used in scams.<sup>90</sup> Truth was less important than consequences.

84 Pierre d'Ailly, *Apologetica defensio astronomice veritatis*, in d'Ailly, *Ymago mundi* (Louvain: n.p., 1483), fol. gg6v, gg8rv.

85 Pierre d'Ailly, *Concordantia*, in d'Ailly, *Ymago mundi*, fol. d6v.

86 D'Ailly, *Concordantia*, fol. d6v. See Laura Ackerman Smoller, *History, Prophecy, and the Stars: The Christian Astrology of Pierre d'Ailly, 1350–1420* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1994), 68, 81, 108–13, 129; Noël Valois, "Un Ouvrage Inédit de Pierre D'ailly: Le *De persecutionibus ecclesiae*," *Bibliothèque de l'École des chartes* 65 (1904): 557–74 (574).

87 Technically he was talking not absolute vs. ordained, but natural astral causality vs. supernatural causality. See William J. Courtenay, "Covenant and Causality in Pierre d'Ailly," *Speculum* 46 (1971): 94–119; Smoller, *History, Prophecy, and the Stars*, 9, 125–26.

88 Jean Gerson, "Deconsolatione theologiae," in OC, IX, 230–34.

89 Mt 7:6. Gerson to Jean Morel (ca. 1408), "Ratio primi est ne detur sanctum canibus et margaritae projiciantur ante porcos..." in OC, II, 95. See Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *The Strange Case of Ermine de Reims* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Philadelphia Press, 2015), <https://doi.org/10.9783/9780812291339>

90 Jean Gerson, "Adversus superstitionem in audiendo missam," in OC, X, 141–43. See Daniel Hobbins, *Authorship and Publicity Before Print* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 28–29.

Gerson could freely adopt such a pragmatic stance because he fully divorced probability from truth: “Many false things are probable; indeed [...] some false things are more probable than some true things.” Probability was partially independent from error: “A probable thing, if rightly established and duly understood, is not to be called error or erroneous except that the assertion is extended pertinaciously beyond probability’s bounds.”<sup>91</sup> Gerson believed that certainty was unachievable by humans, “without revelation,” and that the quest for it was dangerous, because it led to excessive scruples. Instead of certainty, he sought “probable and moral conjecture,” and advised, following Aristotle, that certainty be understood “figuratively.”<sup>92</sup>

Gerson encouraged his audience by promoting this idea of “moral certainty.”<sup>93</sup> A moral certainty was one based on probability, taken “roughly and figuratively [*grossis et figurabilibus*].”<sup>94</sup> A moral certainty was certain except for the slight uncertainty inherent in all knowledge of this kind. It thus represented a high, but incomplete, degree of persuasion.<sup>95</sup>

With Gerson we have the full development of what we might call the “messy world.” Gerson saw a particular messiness in human affairs, since “the diversity of human temperament and condition is incomprehensible; not just in many men, but in one and a single one,” to say nothing of the “different years, nor months, nor weeks, but even days, and hours, and moments.”<sup>96</sup> In the deep ken, astrology could detect subtle consonances, and use those to predict the future. In the plain ken, the messiness of the world, however, made this impossible. Gerson dismissed astrology’s apparent ability to make true predictions: “Many more are false; and indeed they say true ones are either by chance [*a casu*] or by the multitude of predictions they make in total.”<sup>97</sup>

Let us consider a specific ethical conundrum in this messy world. Could and should a priest celebrate the Eucharist—that is, affect the presence of the body and blood of Jesus—after a nocturnal emission?<sup>98</sup> The mainstream advice was that it would be better if a priest in such circumstances avoided celebrating the

91 Jean Gerson, “De puella Aurelianensi,” in OC, IX, 661–62.

92 Jean Gerson, “De contractibus,” in OC, IX, 402.

93 Jean Gerson, “De praeparatione ad missam,” in OC, IX, 37.

94 Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. David Ross (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998), 2–4 (I.3 1094b).

95 Franklin, *Science of Conjecture*, 70, points out that this is dangerous because *certitudo moralis* is not a type of *certitudo*, just as a suspected criminal is not a type of criminal.

96 Jean Gerson, “De perfectione cordis,” in OC, VIII, 129.

97 Jean Gerson, “Tricelogium astrologie theologizate,” in OC, X, 96.

98 The theological tradition even considered whether Jesus himself had nocturnal emissions. John Kitchen, “Cassian, Nocturnal Emissions, and the Sexuality of Jesus,” in *The Seven Deadly Sins From Communities to Individuals*,

Eucharist, unless that avoidance would provoke gossip about the cause. Gerson wrote about this issue at length. If listening to detailed sexual confessions triggered an emission, no sin occurred, but priests should take precautions: avoid hearing confessions before mass, avoid sitting to hear confessions—kneeling is better. Much was uncertain: perhaps a previous sin caused the emission, and perhaps study of the contents of the emission-causing dream would give clues to the previous sin. A polluted priest could be the menstruating woman who was cured by contact with Jesus's clothes (Mt 9:20–22, Mk 5:25–34; Lk 8:43–48): “You suffer bleeding and cannot be cured by doctors,” but “touch the most holy host so that you will be purged.” Unintended emission of semen might increase chastity, as a virgin's chastity was doubled in the case of rape. Gerson suggested the priest address his thoughts, “Bah, bah on you, thoughts most vile! Go away far from here, at an evil hour you have come; I am occupied with other things, and give you no hearing or seeing; depart, go away from here, O sirens, who are sweet until destruction.”<sup>99</sup>

Ultimately, beyond these tactics and speculation, when priests were nervous about the requirement to be in a state of grace while doing the mass, Gerson taught reliance not on certainty, but on moral certainty. That is, priests should strive to do their best without worry.<sup>100</sup> Such a teaching “profits against too many scruples in morals, as they seek a greater certainty than the thing can have” in the absence of extraordinary miraculous revelation. “Moral and probable conjecture,” he echoed Aquinas, “suffices.”<sup>101</sup>

This was part of Gerson's campaign against over-scrupulousness. He thus alluded to Pope Celestine V's (1215–96) dream of riding to a royal court on a donkey unceremoniously defecating in the street, when the king's voice announced there was no pollution from the feces falling unintentionally from Celestine's “corporeal and irrational ass.” Neither fallen feces nor trivial moral details demanded anxiety. Too much scrupulousness could lead to more pollution, Gerson noted, citing Proverbs 30:33: “He that violently bloweth his nose bringeth out blood.” After consulting medical doctors, Gerson reassured priestly readers that “no pollution begun and completed in sleep is a mortal

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ed. Richard Newhauser (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 71–94, <https://doi.org/10.1163/ej.9789004157859.i-312.19>

99 Jean Gerson, “De cognitione castitatis,” in OC, IX, 60–63; Jean Gerson, “De praeparatione ad missam,” 41–48. See Dyan Elliott, “Pollution, Illusion, and Masculine Disarray: Nocturnal Emissions and the Sexuality of the Clergy,” in *Constructing Medieval Sexuality*, ed. Karma Lochrie (Minneapolis, 1997), 9–13.

100 Jean Gerson, “De contractibus,” 402. See Hobbins, *Authorship*, 68–69.

101 Jean Gerson, “Collectorium super Magnificat,” in OC, VIII, 364–65.

sin.”<sup>102</sup> In a plain-ken move, he argued that meaning could not be projected onto an action done without intention.

Gerson’s approach made a practical concession in abandoning the quest for certainty in morals. When deep-ken requirements collided with plain-ken doubts, moral certainty allowed you to move forward with confidence, even if you had no real certainty. Armed only with moral certainty, one could perform the mass after involuntary ejaculation, or sentence an accused to death. This same uncertain, reckless confidence may be a key characteristic of our modern mind.

### Envoi

Theorists sometimes see the heart of modernity in the existential crises created by the nature of truth and certainty. The thinkers under examination here seem to have faced similar crises, with an even greater sense of danger, of instability and high stakes. Nicholas Love (d. ca. 1424) worried about the “safety” of contemplating Jesus in different ways, finally concluding that a devotion to his humanity was less dangerous than a devotion to his divinity.<sup>103</sup> The fifteenth century saw the development of the idea that one did not need certainty to act—an idea that accepted our existence in this messy world. Good authorities give us probability, and what appeared true could be taken as true, probably.<sup>104</sup> Ethical choices involved multiple viable options, one of which must be chosen even without certainty. Thus, a kind of “neo-philosophy” emerged that was comfortable with using plain-ken opinions and probability to address issues once the domain of deep-ken *scientia*. This position, strangely combining a pessimism about our ability to know with an optimism about our intellectual lives despite that inability, became, and remains, a distinctive quality of Far Western culture and thought, from the Scientific Revolution to the present.

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102 Jean Gerson, “De cognitione castitatis,” 62; Jean Gerson, “De praeparatione ad missam,” 41–50. See Elliott, “Pollution,” 11–19.

103 Nicholas Love, *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, ed. Michael G. Sargent (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2004), 10 (lines 23–25).

104 Hobbins, *Authorship*, 68.



# 13. Nicholas of Cusa's Jesus

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Nicholas of Cusa (1401–64) towers, both in his own philosophical stature and in his importance to this book's subject. In an obituary his former secretary Giovanni Andrea Bussi (1417–75) praised Cusa: "He retains by memory all histories, not only ancient, but of the middle season [*mediae tempestatis*], old and more recent up to our own time."<sup>1</sup> As this is one of the earliest references to something like the "Middle Ages," we might say that the medieval period was invented to understand Cusa. He continued to command scholarly interest, and has been described as the last medieval, the first modern, or—in our less exciting terms—the last Early Traditionalist or the first Late Traditionalist. One historian dubbed Nicholas of Cusa "the dance-leader of that preparatory between-space."<sup>2</sup>

Nicholas is additionally important for our purposes because he found a way to negotiate between the kens. That way was Jesus.

This chapter builds on the previous two's investigation of how scholars in the fifteenth century pursued knowledge. Here, we will approach Cusa carefully, by first outlining his biography, and then considering two accessible examples of his thought—a Jesus-themed game he invented, and an optical Jesus illusion—before looking more theoretically at the intellectual problem he faced, his Jesus solution for that problem, and the possible applications of that solution.

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- 1 Giovanni Andrea Bussi, *Preface of the Metamorphoses of Apuleius*, in *Praefationes et Epistolae Editionibus Principibus Auctorum Veterum Propositae*, ed. Beriah Botfield (Cambridge, UK: Prelo Academico, 1861), 76.
  - 2 Richard Falkenberg, *Geschichte der neueren Philosophie von Nikolaus von Kues bis zur Gegenwart* (Leipzig: Viet, 1886), 12. See Elizabeth Brient, *The Immanence of the Infinite: Hans Blumenberg and the Threshold to Modernity* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2002); Catalina M. Cubillos, "Nicholas of Cusa between the Middle Ages and Modernity," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 86 (2012): 237–49, <https://doi.org/10.5840/acpq201286218>; Paul Lehmann, "Vom Mittelalter und von der lateinischen Philologie des Mittelalters," *Quellen und Untersuchungen zur lateinischen Philologie des Mittelalters* 5 (1914): 1–25.



## Biography

In accordance with the decree that councils be called every five years, the new Pope Martin V (1369–31) reluctantly summoned the Council of Pavia, near Milan, in 1423. Plague forced its immediate evacuation to Siena, where it launched redundant decrees against heresies already condemned—specifically pointing to Jan Hus (ca. 1370–1415) and John Wycliffe (ca. 1328–84)—and against the schismatic followers of other clerics claiming their own popes. The Council postponed the difficult work of negotiating a possible union with the Greeks, and dissolved before it had a chance to formally postpone the more difficult work of church reform. Its greatest accomplishment was choosing Basel as the location for its next meeting, which conveniently put the Alps between the next council and papal interference.

As the Council of Pavia concluded, a more consequential event took place 300 km to the east, in Padua. From the university there a twenty-two-year-old foreign student received the doctorate degree of canon law. The German Nikolaus from Kues, on the Moselle River, had entered a Latinate world and became Nicolaus Cusanus, of Cusa. He would dedicate his life to solving every problem plaguing the Pavia-Siena Councils, and—as we will see—to introducing Christology to bowling.

When it finally met in 1431, the Basel Church Council appointed Cusa to its delegation to Constantinople, and that visit quickened his interest in the Greek language.<sup>3</sup> In the late 1440s, he became a cardinal, and in 1450 was appointed the Bishop of Brixen, in the Alps in Tyrol, and a papal legate.

Among Cusa's first duties on behalf of the papacy was a reform tour around central Europe to promote the indulgence declared for the 1450 Jubilee Anniversary. He began this tour by accepting an invitation to say mass at the papal altar in Rome, one of only five instances of this honour bestowed in the fifteenth century. The tour encompassed 80 churches and monasteries, over 15 months, across 4,500 km, on the back of a donkey. Bursting with energy, he banned priests' concubines, suppressed simony, reformed religious orders, forbade nuns from leaving their cloisters, and—on penalty of interdict—required Jews to wear marks identifying themselves.<sup>4</sup>

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3 Martin Honecker, *Nikolaus von Cues und die griechische Sprache* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1938); Erich Meuthen, *Nicholas of Cusa: A Sketch for a Biography*, trans. David Crowner and Gerald Christianson (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 53–54.

4 Meuthen, *Nicholas*, 88–91, 96–97, 117, 134; Donald Sullivan, "Nicholas of Cusa as Reformer: The Papal Legation to the Germanies, 1451–1452," *Medieval Studies* 36 (1994): 382–428.

Cusa described his arrival at Liège, on the edge of the Holy Roman Empire, by comparing it with the Jews' rapturous welcome of Jesus—who, like Cusa, rode a donkey—on Palm Sunday; they were less enthusiastic when he, like Jesus, attempted to “clean their temple.” Cusa's efforts provoked intense hostility to Roman interference in German affairs. Clergy jealous of their prerogatives subverted his reforms, and, in one instance, allegedly extended to him a cross to kiss—one laced with poison, in a failed assassination attempt.<sup>5</sup>

Cusa's last project was Pope Pius II's (1405–64) great crusade. Thousands of knights were wandering erratically around central Italy, and the Pope directed Cusa to organize them against the Ottomans. Cusa died during this work, on 11 August 1464. Three days later, Pius died as well. Cusa's heart was sent to a hospital at Kues, his birthplace, where he had funded a hospital, to serve as the final home—and provide a highly structured and uniform life—for thirty-three poor, work-worn elderly men. The number was chosen with the deep ken to resonate with the years of Jesus's earthly life. Cusa's body was buried at St. Peter in Chains, Rome, and his heart buried under that hospital at Kues.<sup>6</sup>

Cusa's engagement with Jesus was, generally, more deep ken than plain. He chose the same method of transportation, he perhaps almost died via the same instrument—a miniature cross too small to hang from but large enough to be poisoned by—and in death he created an endowment with numerical consonance with Jesus's life. Perhaps in his effort to “clean the temple” we see some plain-ken impulse—an attention to the historical Jesus's own interest in “ecclesiastical” reform—but it is not clear whether this was a plain-ken understanding of the temple as the historical predecessor of the first-century Catholic church, or its symbolic analogue.

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5 The hostility lasted long after his visitation tour ended. In April 1458, the abbess Verena von Stuben of the Benedictine convent of Sonnenburg at Bruneck, who had been deeply opposed to Cusa's “hateful” reforms, illegally sent armed men to collect the local farmers' rent. Resisting with stones, some four dozen farmers died while running off the thugs. Cusanus's captain mounted a counterattack on the convent itself. Because Cusa's forces attributed their victory to God's help, they called the nearby cliff the “Crep de Santa Grazia,” and installed wooden figures representing Jesus and the sleeping disciples. Giovanni Alton, *Proverbi, tradizioni e aneddoti delle valli ladine orientali con versione italiana* (Innsbruck: Wagner, 1881), 90–92; Hermann Hallauer, “Die ‘Schlacht’ im Enneberg 1458,” in *Nicolò Cusano agli inizi del mondo moderno*, ed. Congresso internazionale Nicolò Cusano (Florence: G.C. Sansoni, 1970), 447–69; Meuthen, *Nicholas*, 91–95, 121–22.

6 Morimichi Watanabe, *Nicholas of Cusa: A Companion to His Life and His Times*, ed. Gerald Christianson and Thomas M. Izbicki (Ashgate: Franham, 1988), 356; Meuthen, *Nicholas*, 139–42.

The challenges in Cusa's official life related to a parallel set of challenges in his intellectual life. How should one handle Hussite Christian heretics? How should one respond to Muslims who denied Christianity altogether? How could one know God? How could one know anything? Cusa was aware of the kens grinding against each other, and by the resulting sparks he found an answer in Jesus. First, let us look at two straightforward examples.

### Example I: Jesus Bowling

When the twenty-year-old Duke John of Mosbach (1443–86) visited Rome, he called on Cusa. The conversation worked its way to sports. The young Duke mentioned that “all of us are fascinated with this new and fun game” of bowling. He asked Cusa to explain its symbolism. Cusa agreed that enjoyable games could have moral force: “For example, this very fun game of bowling, it seems to me, symbolizes for us no small amount of philosophy.”<sup>7</sup> He then went on to explain the theory of Jesus Bowling, in the two-part *De ludo globi* [On the Game of the Ball] (1462–63).<sup>8</sup>

Let us first outline the rules of the game. Jesus Bowling used a ball that was not perfectly spherical, but partly concave and partly convex. Rolled, it would trace out a wild spiral path, rather than a straight line. Indeed, the game's “frequent amusement” came as a result of this irregular ball's “variegated and never-certain course.”<sup>9</sup> Ten concentric circles formed a bullseye (see Fig. 13.1). In turns, each player rolled the ball towards the centre, and won points corresponding to which circle it came to rest in. The closer to the innermost circle, the more points were awarded. Whoever reached thirty-four points first won.

7 Nicholas of Cusa, *De Ludo Globi (The Bowling-Game)*, trans. Jasper Hopkins, *Metaphysical Speculations 2* (Minneapolis, MN: Banning, 2000), 1182 (1.2). See Erich Meuthen, “Nikolaus von Kues und die Wittelsbacher,” in *Festschrift für Andreas Kraus zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. Pankraz Fried and Walter Ziegler (Kallmünz: Lessleben, 1982), 111–13. “Curling” more precisely describes this game, but I use “bowling” to follow the scholarship and for the ease of non-Canadian readers.

8 Although unusual, Jesus Bowling was not unique. Jean Gerson had similarly designed a spiritual game of chess, that was simultaneously a musical instrument activated by meditation. Jean Gerson, “Figura scacordi musicalis simul et militaris tamquam chorus castrorum,” in BnF MS Lat. 17487, fol. 225v–26r.

9 Nicholas of Cusa, *De Ludo Globi*, 1206–07 (1.50).

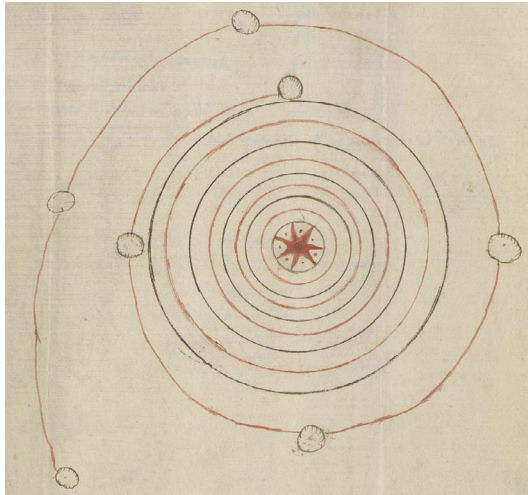


Fig. 13.1 Diagram of Jesus Bowling, Nicholas Cusanus, *De globo*, Kraków, Biblioteka Jagiellońska, BJ Rkp. 682 III, fol. 2v, public domain, <https://jbc.bj.uj.edu.pl/dlibra/publication/600346/edition/602440/content>

The meaning of the game, for Cusa, came from its contrast between the deep-ken perfect circles of the target and the irregular, unpredictable, and therefore plain-ken path to them traced by the deformed ball. As Cusa explained, “When someone throws a bowling-ball, he does not hold it in his hand at one time in the same way as at another time; or he does not release it in the same way or does not place it on the ground in the same way or does not impel it with an equal force. For it is not possible that anything be done twice in exactly the same way.”<sup>10</sup>

Cusa understood the game in Jesus terms. Thus players, and sinners, must negotiate between deep-ken perfection and unexpected plain-ken twists. Cusa explains that “even a curved bowling-ball can be controlled by the practice of virtue, so that after many unstable deviations of movement, the ball stops in the Kingdom of Life.” Jesus showed us how to play, for he “moved the bowling-ball of His own person in such a way that it would come to rest at the Center of Life. He left us an example in order that we would do just as he had done and in order that our bowling-ball would follow” his. Still, Cusa admitted the impossibility “that another ball come to rest at the [exact] same Center of Life at which Christ’s ball comes to rest. For within a circle there are an infinite number of places and mansions.”<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 1184 (1.6).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 1207 (1.51), 1209 (1.54).

When the young Duke remarked “how difficult it is to direct the curved bowling-ball so that it follows the pathway of Christ, in whom was the Spirit-of-God, who led Christ unto the Center of Life,” Cusa replied, “It is very easy for one who has true faith.” The winners are those “certain about the truth of the Gospel because the Son of God does not lie.”<sup>12</sup>

Even the goal of thirty-four points had deep-ken significance. Cusa explained that this corresponds to the years lived by Jesus. There was an odd discrepancy here, for normally Jesus’s lifespan was given as thirty-three years—and Cusa himself later willed the establishment of a hospice for thirty-three poor men. This could reflect an alternate way of counting, in which the first and last units were each counted, so that there were, for example, “eight” days in a week.<sup>13</sup>

## Example 2: A Jesus Optical Illusion

In 1453, Cusa sent a new icon of Jesus, painted in the Netherlands, accompanied by his treatise on divine vision, to the Benedictine Tegernsee Abbey in Bavaria.<sup>14</sup> Cusa, like most contemporary theorists, appreciated the beauty of the human body, which he located in the proportion of its parts, as well as in the brilliance of its colours (see Chapter 15). He especially understood the power of the frontal gaze, the saint in the icon staring directly at the viewer, and found distasteful those modern portraits that used the frontal gaze for secular subjects.<sup>15</sup>

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12 Ibid., 1208 (1.52–53).

13 Nicholas of Cusa, *Gespräch über das Globusspiel*, trans. Gerda von Bredow (Hamburg: Meiner, 2000), 107.

14 On Cusa and images, see Leonard Goldstein, *Social and Cultural Roots of Linear Perspective* (Minneapolis, MN: MEP, 1988), 64–66; Thomas M. Izbicki, “Christiformitas in Nicholas of Cusa’s Roman Sermons (1459),” *Asian Perspectives in the Arts and Humanities* 1 (2011): 1–16, <https://doi.org/10.7282/T3Z31X45>; Joseph Koerner, *The Moment of Self-Portraiture in German Renaissance Art* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 127–30; Clyde L. Miller, “Christiformitas in Nicholas of Cusa,” *The Journal of Religion* 90 (January 2010): 1–14; Clyde L. Miller, “Nicholas of Cusa’s The Vision of God,” in *An Introduction to the Medieval Mystics of Europe*, ed. Paul Szarmach (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1984), 293–312; Clyde L. Miller, “The Icon and the Wall: *Visio* and *Ratio* in Nicholas of Cusa’s *De visione Dei*,” *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 64 (1990): 86–98, <https://doi.org/10.5840/acpapro19906423>

15 Charles H. Carman, “Alberti and Nicholas of Cusa: Perspective as ‘Coincidence of Opposites,’” *Explorations in Renaissance Culture* 33 (2007): 196–219, <https://doi.org/10.1163/23526963-90000339>; Karsten Harries, “On the Power and Poverty of Perspective: Cusanus and Alberti,” in *Cusanus: The Legacy of Learned Ignorance*, ed. Peter J. Casarella (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2006), 105–26, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt284vvk.12>; Giovanni Santinello, “Nicolai De Cusa: Tota pulchra es, amica mea (Sermo de pulchritudine): Introduzione ed ediz. critica,” *Atti e Memorie dell’ Accademia Patavina* 71 (1959): 51–56.

The Jesus image Cusa had given the abbey faced forward. Regardless of the angle between the observing monk and the Jesus image, the observer felt observed: "Stand around it, at a short distance from it, and observe it," Cusa advised, and "regardless of the place from which each of you looks at it, each will have the impression that he alone is being looked at." A monk who paced before it, because he knew the image did not move, "will marvel at the changing of the unchangeable gaze."<sup>16</sup> The popularity of Cusa among Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528) and his friends suggests that Cusa's omnivoyant Jesus may have influenced Dürer's lifelike and Jesus-like self-portrait from 1500 (see Chapter 16).<sup>17</sup>

How did this illusion work? Cusa distinguished between the deep-ken absolute Gaze and the plain-ken vision, which was "contracted to time, to the regions of the world, to individual objects, and to other such conditions."<sup>18</sup>

This was an image of Jesus, who was an image of God. Observers were two steps away from the divine Gaze: Jesus himself was not really looking at the viewer, but the illusion allowed the viewers to engage with Jesus, with some realization that this was not a normal case of someone gazing at them. Much like God, the face could look at multiple people with each person feeling they are being viewed directly and specifically. God's seeing of the viewer was an illusion; in reality, God truly did see him or her, but invisibly. When Cusa spoke of the *visio Dei*, the seeing of God, he used it in two senses simultaneously: God's deep-ken seeing of the monks and the monks' plain-ken seeing of God. Cusa concluded that the two kinds of the seeing of God were in fact one and the same: "O Lord, when you look upon me with an eye of graciousness, what is your seeing, other than your being seen by me? In seeing me, you who are *deus absconditus* [hidden God] give yourself to be seen by me. No one can see You except insofar as you grant that you be seen. To see you is not other than that you see the one who sees you."<sup>19</sup>

Even more broadly, Cusa wrote about the deep-ken potential hidden in the plain-ken world, a potential which he found in a small stone, in a small piece of wood, and in the mustard seed, which Jesus himself had used in a parable.<sup>20</sup> Each of these contained within itself every geometrical shape, and thus the

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16 Nicholas of Cusa, *De Visione Dei*, in *Nicholas of Cusa's Dialectical Mysticism: Text, Translation, and Interpretive Study of De Visione Dei*, trans. Jasper Hopkins (Minneapolis, MN: Banning, 1988), 680–82 (preface, 2–4). See David Freedberg, *Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 52.

17 Joseph Leo Koerner, *Moment of Self-Portraiture in German Renaissance Art* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 129–30.

18 Nicholas of Cusa, *De Visione Dei*, 682 (1.6).

19 *Ibid.*, 686 (5.15).

20 Mt 13:31–32; Mk 4:30–32, Lk 13:18–19.

shapes of all flora and all fauna. A great artist could transform the potentiality of this wood to the actuality of, say, the face of a king. God, however, was the greatest, most subtle artist, who could transform from the smallest substance “all the forms that exist in this world or that could possibly exist in an infinite number of worlds.”<sup>21</sup>

### Cusa’s Two Kens

In his description of images, Cusa spoke of perspectives that might be described as the deep and plain kens, although his usage was more specific than ours. In his other writings, Cusa described the two concepts more generally, not as perspectives, but as realities. Looking with the plain ken, Cusa saw the world and its multiplicity as a kind of *alteritas* [otherness] that he identified with *mutibilitas* [mutability]—impermanence and the tendency to change. Peering underneath that confusion, the deep ken could see oneness, unity, and in fact God himself.<sup>22</sup>

Each of the two realities had its own way of being known. The plain ken was knowable directly by experience. However, one could not be certain about that direct knowledge. We *perceive* the plain-ken world without *comprehending* it, and so could only have “conjectures” about it. Cusa was aware of the plain-ken facets of the limitations of our perceptual knowledge. For example, your visual perception of a body extended in space is limited. Cusa would approve of the cautious observer who saw a black sheep in Scotland, and concluded only that “in at least one field in Scotland, there exists at least one sheep, at least one side of which is black.”<sup>23</sup> Sight knows things from one side and under a certain aspect, and such limitation gives to knowledge a sense of otherness. Going beyond perceptual knowledge, even those symbols and images we use to process perceptions are historically and culturally inflected.<sup>24</sup>

The deep ken, in contrast, could not know *directly*, but the simplicity of the Oneness meant the deep ken can most *certainly* know it. Ultimately, God and infinity were beyond language, where even the law of non-contradiction collapsed. Infinity was beyond reason, which needed quantification and proportions. Cusa explained that “you have seen [...] that precise truth is

21 Nicholas of Cusa, *De quaerendo Deum (On Seeking God)*, in *A Miscellany on Nicholas of Cusa*, trans. Jasper Hopkins (Minneapolis, MN: Banning, 1994), 328 (4.47).

22 Nicholas of Cusa, *On Learned Ignorance (De Docta Ignorantia)*, trans. Jasper Hopkins, 3 vols. (Minneapolis, MN: Banning, 1981), 12–13 (1.7.18).

23 Ian Stewart, “Manifold’s Signs,” *Manifold* 3 (1969): 4.

24 Nicholas of Cusa, *De Coniecturis (On Surmises)*, in *Metaphysical Speculations*, trans. Jasper Hopkins, 2 vols. (Minneapolis, MN: Banning, 2000), II, 188–92 (1.11.54–60).

unattainable. Accordingly, it follows that every human affirmation about what is true is a surmise."<sup>25</sup>

Cusa's problem, then, was how to know. The plain ken could know directly, but without certainty. The deep could know certainly, but not directly. Was there a way to certainly know something directly?

## Jesus to the Rescue

Cusa is most famous for one solution to this problem: ignorance. While he sailed between Constantinople and Venice in the 1437–38 winter, an epiphany something like a divine revelation came to him: "The more he knows that he is unknowing, the more learned he will be."<sup>26</sup> If the how-to-know problem was insurmountable, then the wise person should take intellectual refuge in the limitations of that knowledge. This kind of scepticism Cusa called "learned ignorance" (or "sacred ignorance"). He reported the results in a treatise of the same name, *De docta ignorantia* (1440).<sup>27</sup>

Such an attitude was controversial at the time. The most prominent critics included the theology professor Johannes Wenck, who around 1443 composed *De ignota litteratura* [On Ignorant Learning] to expose the dangers of Cusa's thought for Christology. He raised his own skepticism, adding a "perhaps" even to his accusation that "this man of learned ignorance, who under the guise of religion cunningly deceives those not yet having trained senses," was the false prophet predicted by 1 Jn 4:1: "Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world." Wenck associated Cusan thought with that of the Waldensian Poor and the Wycliffites, whose teachings "have long shown from what spirit this learned ignorance proceeds."<sup>28</sup>

25 Nicholas of Cusa, *De Coniecturis*, 163 (1.0.2); Nicholas of Cusa, *De Visione Dei*, 705 (13.55). See Wolfgang Achtner, "Infinity as a Transformative Concept in Science and Theology," in *Infinity: New Research Frontiers*, ed. Michael Heller and W. Hugh Woodin (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2011), 19–52 (34), <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511976889.003>

26 *On Learned Ignorance*, I, 6 (1.1.4).

27 See Meuthen, *Nicholas*, 32, 58–66, 83; Brient, *Immanence of the Infinite*, 184–242; Rudolf Haubst, *Das Bild des Einen und Dreieinen Gottes in der Welt nach Nikolaus von Kues* (Trier: Paulinus, 1952); Rudolf Haubst, *Die Christologie des Nikolaus von Kues* (Freiburg: Herder, 1956); Alexandre Koyré, *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins, 1957), 6–24; Dermot Moran, "Nicholas of Cusa (1401–1464): Platonism at the Dawn of Modernity," in *Platonism at the Origins of Modernity*, ed. Douglas Hedley and Sarah Hutton (Dordrecht: Springer, 2008), 9–29, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-6407-4\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-6407-4_2)

28 Rudolf Haubst, *Studien zu Nikolaus von Kues und Johannes Wenck* (Münster: Aschendorff 1955); Jasper Hopkins, *Nicholas of Cusa's Debate with John Wenck: A*



However, Cusa did not stop there, and found a more productive solution, less remembered today, in Jesus.

What was the relationship between the two kens? First, we need to understand the deep-ken nature of God, which for Cusa presented challenges and opportunities. For Cusa, only God was actually infinite. God was the “Absolute Maximality” and “Infinite Oneness” (*unitas infinita*).<sup>29</sup>

Cusa’s doctrine of the *coincidentia oppositorum* [coincidence of opposites] brought the absolute minimum and the absolute maximum together. Cusa wrote that “the oppositeness of opposites is oppositeness without oppositeness.” He identified God, infinite, with this “oppositeness of opposites.”<sup>30</sup> God’s infinite was (through *coincidentia oppositorum*) not just maximally large, but at the same time maximally large and minimally small. God was “that simplicity where contradictories coincide [*ubi contradictoria coincident*].”<sup>31</sup>

Jesus lay at the centre of this labyrinthine conundrum. Oneness, the most pure and the most simple, was the foundation for multiplicity, which allowed all the multiples to cohere: as one modern Cusa scholar has summarized, “since

*Translation and an Appraisal of De ignota litteratura and Apologia doctae ignorantiae* (Minneapolis, MN: Arthur J. Banning, 1988), 426.

- 29 Nicholas of Cusa, *On Learned Ignorance*, I, 11 (1.5.14). The early Greeks had a negative view of infinity, because of its lack of rational structure—for example,  $\sqrt{2}$  has no equivalent in the ratios of counting numbers;  $99/70$  is only a rough approximation. For Aristotle, a “potential” infinity could be constructed from a rational process of approximation (1.414...). Plotinus turned infinity into a positive good, and identified God as a potential infinity. Nyssa, with Dionysius following him, pushed this forward: Motivated to defend against Arianism, he argued that God was an “actual” infinity, even though that is beyond reason. Infinity for Cusa went beyond all quantity, and so he could not accept Aristotle’s potential infinite. After Cusa everyone opposed actual infinities, in part because of the realization, demonstrated by Nicole Oresme, that there are not fewer odd natural numbers (1, 3, 5, 7 ...) than natural numbers (1, 2, 3, 4 ...). Only with Bernard Bolzano (1781–1848) do we get serious attempts, accepted as successful by the experts, to resolve these apparent contradictions with reason. That impulse culminated in Georg Cantor’s (1845–1918) identification of God as an actual infinity that did not lack rational structure. These discussions operate in the gray borderland between the kens. What has more deep-ken beauty,  $\sqrt{2}$  or  $99/70$ ? The former has fewer digits, the latter is more complex but is an approximation. A potential infinity is a process of construction and approximation *in time* (plain ken), although the end result is exact but cannot be achieved in time (deep ken). Achtner, “Infinity as a Transformative Concept”; J. Sesiano, “Vergleiche zwischen unendlichen Mengen bei Nicolas Oresme,” in *Mathematische Probleme im Mittelalter—der lateinische und arabische Sprachbereich*, ed. M. Folkerts (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1996), 361–78; Stefan Kirschner ed., *Nicolaus Oresmes Kommentar zur Physik des Aristoteles* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1997).
- 30 Nicholas of Cusa, *De Visione Dei*, 703–07 (13.52–59).
- 31 Nicholas of Cusa, *On Learned Ignorance*, I, 8–9 (1.4.11–12), 12 (1.6.16–17), 24–25 (1.16.42), III, 151 (263).

there is nothing real that is not different from all other real things there exists a general dissimilarity of things. Yet, since the oneness of the world is in them, they still correspond to each other. Dissimilarity and correspondence, *differentia* and *concordantia*, constitute the principles of the structure of the world."<sup>32</sup> Cusa located that diversity in the concordance in the one Jesus.<sup>33</sup> Each ken dwelt within the other through Jesus.

This was the highest possible form of knowing that we could attain, namely the analogous recognition of knowing that we did not know. We could only get negative knowledge of God, what he was not. Opposites came together—creating maximum dissonance—and that was where God was. Given his divinity and humanity, everything was combined and unified in Jesus. His infinity was more than the greatest; it was maximum and minimum at the same time.

### Application 1: Unify the Christian Subcult

Especially given its links to the deep ken and the divine, unity was a priority for Cusa, both within Christianity and between Christianity and Islam. Many of his contemporaries also looked with the deep ken towards Unity as an indisputable desideratum. The Italian cardinal Francesco Zabarella (1360–1417), for example, argued that disunity contradicted the Church being the (one) wife of Jesus, who himself prayed, "Father preserve them that they may be one as we" (Jn 17:11).<sup>34</sup>

Before we look at Cusa's more practical efforts, we can consider his theory of the unified Church.

Cusa pioneered democratic theory. Though taking a special interest in the rights of those who hold a minority view, Cusa found the true Church was always located in the majority. Before later in life drawing more into the papal fold, he initially drew from conciliarist ideas of the Council of Constance (1414–18), supporting the supremacy of council over pope. To a high degree, a universal council's decisions were *infallibilis* [infallible] and *tutius* [secure]. Infallibility was relative to salvation: a council's infallible teaching was not absolute truth, but even if wrong would not count against the salvation of those who followed it.<sup>35</sup>

32 Meuthen, *Nicholas of Cusa*, 65.

33 *On Learned Ignorance*, III, 146 (3.12.256).

34 Thomas E. Morrissey, "The Call for Unity at the Council of Constance: Sermons and Addresses of Cardinal Zabarella, 1415–1417," *Church History* 53 (1984): 307–18 (313–15), <https://doi.org/10.2307/3166271>

35 Nicholas of Cusa, *The Catholic Concordance*, trans. Paul E. Sigmund (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1991), 47–48 (2.17.67–68), 71–72 (2.7.95); Nicholas of Cusa, *De usu communionis*, in *Haec accurata cognitio trium voluminum operum*, 3 vols. (Paris: Vaenundantur cum caeteris eius operibus in aedibus Ascensianis, 1514),

Jesus appeared most importantly in Cusa's writings on the Church as an institution in two ways.

First, Jesus was married to the Church, and functioned as the Church's core unity: "Flowing from the one King of Peace with infinite concordance, a sweet spiritual harmony of agreement emanates in successive degrees to all its members who are subordinated and united to him. Thus, one God is all things in all things." The Church reflected the universe. For Cusa, the plain-ken multiplicity did not disunite the deep-ken unity, nor did the unity bulldoze through the multiplicity, but multiplicity found its fulfillment in unity. There were political consequences to this, namely that subjects' consent was the foundation for governance, for "men are by nature equal in power and equally free."<sup>36</sup>

Second, Jesus's promise to Peter gave the Church absolute power. Cusa saw a series of priests going back to Jesus, and a series of popes going back to Peter. Thus, the entire Church (multiplicity) was contained in the pope (unity). The Church then used its authority to give authority to the Gospel, to Jesus's commandments, and to its own rituals.<sup>37</sup>

Alongside these deep-ken reflections on Jesus-based unity, Cusa worked out practical strategies, essentially using the plain ken, that looked at historical change over time. For example, Cusa thought that Bohemians and Greeks must return to the Church. Cusa saw controversies about the filioque, a controversial credal clause, as the major obstacle to reunion with the Greeks, and attempted to solve it, with a plain-ken philology, by bringing back from Constantinople manuscript sources dealing with the seventh, eighth, and ninth centuries.<sup>38</sup>

A similar strategy appeared in Cusa's 1433 *De communione sub utraque specie* [On Communion in Both Kinds]. His approach was relatively friendly to Hussites. He admitted that alternative opinions were not necessarily incompatible with Church unity, which was what was truly essential. With the

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II, fol. 5r–9v. See Thomas Prügl, "The Concept of Infallibility in Nicholas of Cusa," in *Cusanus*, ed. Casarella, 150–77 (156, 163–67), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt284vvk.15>; Meuthen, *Nicholas of Cusa*, 44, 49; Paul de Vooght, "Esquisse d'une enquête sur le mot «infaillibilité» durant la période scholastique," in *L'infaillibilité de l'église*, ed. O. Rousseau (Gembloux: Chevetogne, 1962), 99–146.

36 Nicholas of Cusa, *The Catholic Concordance*, 5 (1.1.4), 98 (2.14.127). See Meuthen, *Nicholas of Cusa*, 45–46.

37 *De usu communionis*, 7r. See Meuthen, *Nicholas of Cusa*, 81, Prügl, "Concept of Infallibility," 152–59; Watanabe, *Nicholas of Cusa*, 24, 172.

38 Meuthen, *Nicholas of Cusa*, 53–55; Anthony Edward Siecienski, *The Filioque: History of a Doctrinal Controversy* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010), 157, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195372045.001.0001>; Isaac Schoeber, "Temporal and Perdurable Byzantine Perspectives on the Fifteenth-Century Decree of Church Union" (unpublished manuscript, 2 August 2023).

plain ken, he accepted that the sacrament had changed through history, and thus could change again, as long as this did not detract from the unity of the Church, in itself and in the sacrament. The Hussites, however, erred in deviating from custom and in permitting disunity. They should therefore reunite with Rome. Cusa proposed a compromise: they be allowed Communion in both kinds, and in return drop their demands for unlicensed preaching, for the policing of morality, and for clerical poverty. The Hussites declined, but Cusa's proposal would later underlie the eventual 1436 resolution.<sup>39</sup> This was a plain-ken tactic to achieve a deep-ken goal.

## Application 2: Unify the Christians and Muslims

Cusa showed a parallel interest in relations between Christians and Muslims.<sup>40</sup> The fall or liberation of Constantinople in 1453 motivated much of his efforts here. His insight was that "peace" could be achieved through the deep-ken harmony of doctrines. He wished that "henceforth all the diverse religions be harmoniously reduced, by the common consent of all men, unto one inviolable" religion, because a core doctrine common to all religions was hidden behind the plain-ken diversity of ritual. This peace would necessarily happen because truth itself was one. Every religion sought to be true. Christian doctrine was true, and indeed was the only truth fully revealed by God. Thus, Cusa argued, every religion "presupposes that Christ died and ascended into Heaven," and was seeking to be Christianity.<sup>41</sup> Truth was one, and there was only one orthodox

39 Meuthen, *Nicholas of Cusa*, 38–39.

40 J. E. Biechler, "A New Face toward Islam: Nicholas of Cusa and John of Segovia," in *Nicholas of Cusa in Search of God and Wisdom*, ed. G. Christianson and T. M. Izbicki (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 185–202; Darío Cabanelas, *Juan de Segovia y el problema islámico* (Madrid: Universidad de Madrid, 1952); Marica Costigliolo, *Islam e Cristianesimo: mondi di differenze nel Medioevo: Il dialogo con l'Islam nell'opera di Nicola da Cusa* (Genova: Genova UP, 2012); Walter A. Euler, "Una religio in rituum varietate—der Beitrag des Nikolaus von Kues zur Theologie der Religionen," *Jahrbuch für Religionswissenschaft und Theologie der Religionen* 3 (1995): 67–82; T. M. Izbicki, "The Possibility of Dialogue with Islam in the Fifteenth Century," in *Nicholas of Cusa*, ed. Christianson and Izbicki, 175–83; Steven J. McMichael, "The Death, Resurrection, and Ascension of Jesus in Medieval Christian Anti-Muslim Religious Polemics," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 21 (2010): 157–73, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09596411003619806>; Meuthen, *Nicholas of Cusa*, 129–30; Morimichi Watanabe, "Nicholas of Cusa and the Idea of Tolerance," in *Nicolò Cusano agli inizi del mondo moderno*, ed. Congresso internazionale Nicolò Cusano (Florence: C. Sansoni, 1970), 409–18.

41 Nicholas of Cusa, *De Pace Fidei (On Peaceful Unity of Faith)*, *Nicholas of Cusa's De pace fidei and Cribratio Alkorani: Translation and Analysis*, trans. Jasper Hopkins (Minneapolis, MN: Banning, 1994), 636–37 (3.8–9), 659 (14.49).

faith, but plain-ken divergent customs were acceptable if that deep-ken orthodox unity was maintained in peace.

Cusa believed that he understood the Qur'an better than Muslims did. Cusa found in the Qur'an a very positive attitude to Jesus, who was the "spirit and soul of God" and the "supreme envoy of God." Cusa read Qur'an 3:45 as Jesus being "a good and the best man, and the face of all people in this and the future age." The Qur'an, of course, did have a positive attitude towards Jesus, although some of these specific phrases derived from Cusa's dependence on Robert of Ketton's (fl. 1150s) skewed Latin translation. Cusa concluded from this phrasing that Muslims understood Jesus to be the son of God: using the following verse (3:46), Cusa took Jesus as being *sapiens* [wise], but concluded that because God was *sapiens* and wisdom was united, Jesus must therefore be God. Cusa further argued that Muslims did not understand that death honoured, not shamed, Jesus. Indeed, even if Muslims did not realize it, they actually believed in the Trinity. God was not numerically or essentially three, Cusa explained, but related to Himself in three ways; for example, the Father was only a father because there is a Son. Muslims, and Jews, would recognize the Resurrection of Jesus if only they were less ignorant. Cusa appreciated the Qur'an's agreement with the New Testament that Jesus lived still. Writing to Juan of Segovia (ca. 1395–1458), Cusa recommended that Christians defending their faith should seek out Qur'anic passages compatible with the Gospel: "We find in it such things that serve us; and those which oppose us we interpret through those" which do serve us.<sup>42</sup> Cusa used the Gospel as a foundation with which to correctly interpret the Qur'an; that is, he would interpret it in consonance with the Old and New Testaments, a reflection of this deep-ken unity.

For Cusa, the Qur'an was in fact an *occultatus* [hidden] Gospel, with a hidden meaning. His plain-ken justification for this strategy was temporal and philological: considering history, Cusa asserted that Muhammad was a Nestorian Christian brought up by Nestorians, but he had to adapt his message to his ignorant polytheistic audience. Jesus had perfected Moses's path to God, and Muhammad tried to make it easy enough for polytheists to tread. Considering

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42 Nicholas of Cusa, *Cribratio Alkorani (A Scrutiny of the Koran)*, in *Nicholas of Cusa's De pace fidei and Cribratio Alkorani: Translation and Analysis*, trans. Jasper Hopkins (Minneapolis, MN: Banning, 1994), 997–98 (1.16.68), 1000–01 (1.18.75–76), 1001–02 (1.19.77–80), 1023–26 (2.8.107–2.11.114), 1029 (2.13.121), 1036–39 (2.16.133–39); Nicholas of Cusa to John of Segovia (29 December 1454), in *Opera Omnia*, ed. Raymundus Klibansky and Hildebrandus Bascour, 22 vols. (Leipzig and Hamburg: Meiner: 1932–83), VII, 99. See Walter Andreas Euler, "An Italian Painting from the Late Fifteenth Century and the *Cribratio alkorani* of Nicholas of Cusa," in *Cusanus*, ed. Casarella, 127–42 (131–32, 141), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt284vvk.13>

the texts, he argued that after Muhammad's death the Jews edited the Qur'an to include anti-Christian passages. Maybe, Cusa sniffed, Muhammad was also ignorant or arrogant.<sup>43</sup> Cusa thus used plain-ken reasoning to justify his deep-ken vision.

In his later writings, Cusa shifted from this general tolerance to a more focused, and less tolerant, look at the plain-ken particularities of Islam and the Qur'an. In 1437, Cusa had been in Constantinople as an emissary from the Council of Basel minority, where he had studied the Qur'an in consultation with Christian scholars. Now he put that knowledge to use, especially in his 1454 letter to Juan of Segovia and the 1461 *Cribratio alkorani* [Sifting the Qur'an], the latter written at the urging of Pius II.<sup>44</sup> Like Segovia, Cusa wanted to use dialogue and mission against the Turks. Setting a good example, he felt, would be more effective than actual fighting. This likely came from his optimism about the power of morality, and his pessimism about the power of the Turks. Eventually both would lead him to despair. Fearing the advance of the "enemies of the cross of Christ," Cusa wrote with resignation to the Archbishop of Trier, Jacob von Sierck (d. 1456): he worried that their power would "flagellate us" because he saw no possible alliance for resisting them. Instead, Christians should seek refuge in God, "although," Cusa added grimly, "He does not hear sinners."<sup>45</sup> Cusa died preparing the Pope's crusade against the Ottomans.

### Application 3: Reliable Knowledge

Despite the impossibility of certain knowledge, we can use this coincidence of the two kens to sort-of know, to "investigate incomprehensibly."<sup>46</sup> Cusa described the way forward, the way for us to sort-of know, in two ways.

First, our minds could move "into a certain secret and hidden silence wherein there is no knowledge or concept of a face," characterizing it as an "obscuring mist, haze, darkness or ignorance."<sup>47</sup> Wisdom cannot be tasted, and so "it is tasted untasteably [*ingustabiliter ergo gustatur*], since it is higher than everything

43 Nicholas of Cusa, *Cribratio Alkorani*, 967–69 (prologue, 7–11), 999–1000 (1.17.72–74), 1028–29 (2.12.119), 1045–48 (2.19.154–58). See Qur'an 3:7 and Euler, "An Italian Painting," 131–39.

44 Nathan Ron, "Erasmus's Attitude toward Islam in Light of Nicholas of Cusa's *De pace fidei* and *Cribratio Alkorani*," *Revista Española de Filosofía Medieval* 26 (2019): 113–36.

45 "Nicholas of Cusa to Jacob von Sierck (October 9, 1453)," in *Acta Cusana: Quellen zur Lebensgeschichte des Nikolaus von Kues*, ed. Johannes Helmrath and Thomas Woelki, 2 vols. (Hamburg: Meiner, 2016), II, 552–53 (nr. 3673).

46 Nicholas of Cusa, *On Learned Ignorance*, I, 6 (1.2.5).

47 Nicholas of Cusa, *De Visione Dei*, 689–70 (6.22)

tasteable, everything sensible, everything rational, and everything intelligible. But this tasting-untasteably-and-from-afar occurs, as it were, just as a certain fragrant scent can be said to be an untasteable foretasting."<sup>48</sup> Considered another way, "truth may be likened unto the most absolute necessity (which cannot be either something more or something less than it is), and our intellect may be likened unto possibility."<sup>49</sup>

The other way of describing a way forward was with symbols and mathematics, by which we can know, partially, an infinite God. In mathematics, we can extrapolate infinite from finite math objects; in the same way, we can reach towards truth. Because mathematical entities exist only as mental objects, we can use our minds to understand their essence. In mathematics, we know, "with absolute certainty," that every point on a circle is the same distance from the centre. However, symbols cannot give us certainty about God.<sup>50</sup>

Consider a circle. As a circle becomes bigger, its curved circumference gets closer to a straight tangent. At these extremes the straight and the curve, opposites, converge—and the centre becomes uncertain.<sup>51</sup>

Consider Jesus. A crude approximation of the relationship between his humanity and divinity might be a triangle, representing his humanity, inscribed in a circle, which represents his divinity. The triangle is in a sense more knowable than the circle; the length of its sides might be measured by a ruler in a way a circle could not. There is still a gap between the length of the human triangle (5.1961524..., for a one-unit radius) and the circumference of the divine circle ( $2\pi=6.2831853...$ ). We can improve on the approximation by replacing the triangle with a square, improve it further by replacing the square with a pentagon, and so on. Jesus, both human and divine, can be, partially, understood as the limit of a series of regular  $n$ -gons, a kind of infinity-gon.<sup>52</sup> The mathematical limit is the basis of calculus, and indeed this is a more certain

48 Nicholas of Cusa, *Idiota de Sapientia*, in *Nicholas of Cusa on Wisdom and Knowledge*, trans. Jasper Hopkins (Minneapolis, MN: Banning, 1996), 502 (1.10).

49 Nicholas of Cusa, *On Learned Ignorance*, I, 8 (1.3.10).

50 Ibid., I, 19–20 (1.11.32, 1.12.33). See Inigo Bocken, "Mathematik in der Philosophie des Cusanus: Die Zahl als Grundlage der Bedeutung bei Nikolaus von Kues," *Mitteilungen und Forschungsbeiträge der Cusanus-Gesellschaft* 29 (2005): 201–20; Meuthen, *Biography*, 61–64.

51 Nicholas of Cusa, *On Learned Ignorance*, I, 20–22 (1.13.35–36), 29 (1.18.52).

52 Ibid., I, 7–8 (1.3.9–10), 33 (1.20.60), III, 119–23 (3.3.198–99 to 3.4.206). See Elizabeth Brient, "How Can the Infinite be the Measure of the Finite? Three Mathematical Metaphors from *De docta ignorantia*," in *Cusanus*, ed., Casarella, 210–25 (220–24), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt284vkv.18>; Fritz Nagel, *Nicolaus Cusanus—mathematicus theologicus: Unendlichkeitsdenken und infinitesimalmathematik* (Trier: Paulinus, 2007).

foundation than was used by Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz and Isaac Newton in the seventeenth century.

Similarly, Jesus is the limit of the potentiality of the human intellect: "Whatever intellectually gifted people are capable of knowing was reality in Christ."<sup>53</sup>

Thus, Cusa's skepticism was not total. Oneness is simple and therefore certain, and oneness is not a concept but God. We work from what we know using logic, to what we do not know, like God. We can use symbols to learn about God. We do know that every point on a circle is equidistant from its centre, and we can build from this mathematical certainty. One modern Cusa scholar puts this more clearly: the "straight line is no longer a given length, but, exceeding all dimensions, is infinite. Then it is simultaneously the infinite triangle, the infinite circle, the infinite sphere, because the circle with the largest circumference is the least curved, and the least curved line is straight. Of course, our conceptual thinking cannot comprehend this convergence of infinite figures, yet reason compels us to acknowledge it."<sup>54</sup>

We can look at Cusa's epistemology another way, by looking at a more practical text. In a sermon on the Lord's Prayer, Cusa noted that "just as divinity lay hidden in the humanity of Christ, so also all intelligible wisdom is hidden in the simple words of Christ's teaching, which no one in this world can completely comprehend." This gives us a need for teachers, since people will understand the Lord's Prayer with greater or lesser insight: "That is why one person, in accordance with the grace of God, can have a clearer and higher insight into the words of the *Pater noster* than another, just as one person has sharper eyes than another for gazing at the sun."<sup>55</sup>

#### Application 4: Relativistic Spacetime

For now, we conclude with a single example of Cusa's thought, which itself casts a shadow across the next centuries of world history, until today. This is relativistic spacetime, the most plain-ken of Cusa's conceptions, although even this is rooted in the deep ken.

Cusa derived an unbounded universe without a centre from the omnipotence of God. In his *Idiota de mente* [The Layman on Mind] (ca. 1450), the infinite benevolence and knowledge of God were linked to the straight line and to

53 Quoted in Meuthen, *Nicholas of Cusa*, 66. See Brient, "How Can," 224.

54 Meuthen, *Nicholas of Cusa*, 60.

55 Nicholas of Cusa, "Nicholas of Cusa's Sermon on the Pater Noster," in *Cusanus*, ed. Peter Casarella, trans. Frank Tobin, 1–25 (5), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt284vvk.7>



basic units of measurement, for the divine gift of measuring was fundamental to human wisdom. He understood the universe, a mirror of God, to be, in a way, infinite with respect to space and motion. “God, who is everywhere and nowhere,” Cusa wrote, was the universe’s “circumference and center.” If the centre was the circumference, then there was no centre, and the earth was uncentred and in relative motion. The centre of the universe came together with its circumference, so the universe itself did not have a circumference. Indeed, God, as existence’s own absolute maximum, became the “centre of the earth and of all the spheres.” Space was all homogenous in terms of its nobility. For Cusa, the earth was not at rest, so motion and space must both be relative: wherever you found yourself was the centre of the universe. The limitations on our knowledge of ourselves and the universe paved the way for the relativity of space and time.<sup>56</sup>

This shows a plain-ken awareness of temporality and perspective, that the observer’s location powerfully informs what is seen and how it is seen. Aristotle (384–322 BC) had denied the existence of a “void,” since motion required a medium. His universe was limited, and finite. Thomas Bradwardine (ca. 1300–49) had identified God with an infinite sphere with omnipresent centre and no circumference.<sup>57</sup> A century later, the Jewish theologian Hasdai Crescas (ca. 1340–1410/11) effectively invented unified, homogeneous, infinite space.<sup>58</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, parallel to Crescas, and building on a tradition going back at least to the thirteenth century, described the power of God in terms of an infinite physical space, strikingly similar to the space of the linear perspectivists. He was, moreover, a prominent voice for them, and had connections with them. Leon Battista Alberti (1404–72) (see Chapter 14) and Cusa were familiar with each other’s work, and probably knew each other personally.<sup>59</sup>

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56 Nicholas of Cusa, *On Learned Ignorance*, II, 89–93 (2.11.156 to 2.12.162). See Samuel Edgerton, *Renaissance Recovery of Linear Perspective* (New York: Basic Books, 1975), 36–37; Karsten Harries, “The Infinite Sphere: Comments on the History of a Metaphor,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 13 (1975): 5–15 (6); Max Jammer, *Concepts of Space: The History of Theories of Space in Physics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1969), 82–84; Eli Maor, *To Infinity and Beyond: A Cultural History of the Infinite* (Boston, MA: Birkhauser Boston, 1986), 190–91; Sarah Powrie, “The Importance of Fourteenth-Century Natural Philosophy for Nicholas of Cusa’s Infinite Universe,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 87 (2013): 33–53, <https://doi.org/DOI.10.5840/acpq20138712>

57 Thomas Bradwardine, *De causa Dei*, ed. Henry Saville (London: Billium, 1618), 179.

58 Hasdai Crescas, *Light of the Lord (or Hashem)*, trans. Roslyn Weiss (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2018), 9, 32–39, 72–77, 274–76. See Jammer, *Concepts of Space*, 74–82.

59 Charles H. Carman, *Leon Battista Alberti and Nicholas Cusanus: Towards an Epistemology of Vision for Italian Renaissance Art and Culture* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014); Cesare Catà, “Pespicere Deum: Nicholas of Cusa and European

To understand the deep-ken unity that undergirds all his thought, we might describe Cusa's spiritual demography as a series of nested circles, as in the playing field of Jesus Bowling. In the innermost, we have the loyal Church, bound together by a political theory that associates consensus with union. Because of Jesus's promise to Peter, the Church has an absolute power, and the pope was a "holy prince." This effects a spiritual marriage between Jesus and the Church. The second ring holds those Christians not in unity, which would include the Greeks and the Bohemians. In the third ring, we see representatives of all nations and religions together before Jesus (even if, say, the Muslims did not recognize this). Beyond the third ring is everything, all creatures, combined and unified in Jesus, through the combination of his divinity and humanity. Between the deep-ken unity and the plain-ken multiplicity, Cusa's skepticism combined with his negative theology, and led to a practicality evident in his attitude towards Wilsnack, and to a transcendent impulse that links us back to the universal unity in Jesus.

## Envoi

Five hundred years later, scholars began to celebrate Cusa as the first modern thinker, or a "medieval thinker for the modern age."<sup>60</sup> Even outside of Europe, the *Círculo de Estudios Cusanos de Buenos Aires*, the Cusanus Society of America, and the Japanese Cusanus Society sprang up. Ernst Cassirer (1874–1945) began this renaissance when he argued that Cusa's reconciliation of what we here refer to as the two kens makes him "the first modern thinker."<sup>61</sup> One modern commentator sees him as the herald of the scientific revolution, for Cusa "preserved the place of rationality in theology by transforming the ontological infinity of God into an infinity of epistemological processes, in mathematics,

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Art of the Fifteenth Century," *Viator* 39 (2008): 285–305, <https://doi.org/10.1484/J.VIATOR.1.100123>; Joan Gadol, "The Unity of the Renaissance: Humanism, Natural Science and Art," in *From the Renaissance to the Counter-Reformation: Essays in Honor of Garrett Mattingly*, ed. Charles H. Carter (New York: Random House, 1966), 29–55; Edward E. Lowinsky, "The Concept of Physical and Musical Space in the Renaissance (A Preliminary Sketch)," *Papers of the American Musicological Society* (1941): 57–84; Tom Müller, *Perspektivität und Unendlichkeit: Mathematik und ihre Anwendung in der Frührenaissance am Beispiel von Alberti und Cusanus* (Regensburg: Roderer, 2010); Rhys W. Roark, "Nicholas Cusanus, Linear Perspective, and the Finite Cosmos," *Viator* 41 (2010): 315–66, <https://doi.org/10.1484/J.VIATOR.1.100577>

60 Kazuhiko Yamaki, ed., *Nicholas of Cusa: A Medieval Thinker for the Modern Age* (Richmond: Curzon, 2002).

61 Ernst Cassirer, *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*, trans. Mario Domandi (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1963), 10.

physical sciences, as well as philosophy. Thus, he created the epistemological prerequisites of modern natural science."<sup>62</sup> For Cusa, as for all skeptics, certain knowledge was not possible. However, the coming together of the two kens in Jesus allowed for some investigation, though flawed, of the world. While today scholars particularly appreciate Cusa's development of plain-ken thought, it was his Jesus-rooted reconciliation of both kens that had consequences beyond his contemporary needs. Jesus's significance for Cusa and Cusa's importance for the modern mind suggest the fundamental importance of Jesus in conditioning how we have come to think today.

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62 Achtner, "Infinity as a Transformative Concept," 37.

# SIGHTS



# 14. Art and the Deep Ken

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Consider three visual portrayals of Jesus's entombment (see Fig. 14.1). The first is a fifteenth-century Russian icon, created to be seen with the deep ken. The second is an early seventeenth-century painting by Caravaggio (1571–1610). Although these two images are less than two centuries apart, the difference is stark: While the Caravaggio approximates photorealism, the icon strives for a realism of another kind. The third is a still from the Ludovica Rambelli Teatro's recent live recreation of that Caravaggio painting. Caravaggio's creation closely replicates the appearance of Italian humans, in his time and ours. With little interest in worldly appearances, the deep ken focuses on another question: how closely does it replicate the true reality of Jesus and his entombers?

This is the first of three chapters on visual representations of Jesus. The first describes deep-ken approaches to the problem of representation. The second (Chapter 15) examines the development of plain-ken approaches tending towards a more historical proto-photorealism. The third (Chapter 16) uses the two kens to frame a discussion of the Jesus images hailed in the fifteenth century as the most accurate and powerful.

## Contours of Deep-ken Art

Let us begin with a manuscript particularly rich with deep-ken art. The Ottheinrich ("Otto Henry") Bible is the earliest surviving illustrated German New Testament. It was made around 1430, but most of the miniatures were only completed in the 1530s. Many of the images have a dreamlike quality that invites, and resists, investigation. The depiction of Jesus walking on the water (Mt 14) is mesmerizing (see Fig. 14.2). The subject lends itself to this kind of portrayal. The homogeneity of the sea, disrupted by waves, allows for a simple abstract pattern, even less complex than the sky, where a stylized golden vine on red impossibly overlays the stay ropes stabilizing the mast. Peter's near drowning allows him to be portrayed from an overhead angle, where his face stands out above a formless blue garment covering his body. Jesus's face is missing entirely, presumably a casualty of pious viewers who engaged the image with hands or lips in addition to their eyes (see Chapter 20). The depiction of the Last Supper has multiple perspectives (see Fig. 14.3). We observe the table from above, making the food and dishes clear, and the floor from





Fig. 14.2 *Walking on the Water*, Ottheinrich Bible (ca. 1430), BSB Cgm 8010(1, fol. 26r, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, CC BY-NC-SA, [http://daten.digitalle-sammlungen.de/bsb00021200/image\\_54](http://daten.digitalle-sammlungen.de/bsb00021200/image_54)



Fig. 14.3 *Last Supper*, Ottheinrich Bible (ca. 1430), BSB Cgm 8010(1, fol. 40v, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, CC BY-NC-SA, [http://daten.digitalle-sammlungen.de/bsb00021200/image\\_83](http://daten.digitalle-sammlungen.de/bsb00021200/image_83)



Such images strike me as fundamentally otherworldly. A Byzantine icon of Jesus, for example, does not look much like anyone I have ever seen. Such images do not look like our reality. The icons' abstraction locates them closer to modern cartoons than to the photorealism of later paintings and of the world around us.



Fig. 14.4 *Genealogy*, Ottheinrich Bible (ca. 1430), BSB Cgm 8010(1, fol. 10v, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, CC BY-NC-SA, [http://daten.digital-e-sammlungen.de/bsb00021200/image\\_23](http://daten.digital-e-sammlungen.de/bsb00021200/image_23)

In the comic strip *Calvin and Hobbes*, Calvin asks his father, “How come old photographs are always black and white? Didn’t they have color film back then?” His father explains: “Sure they did. In fact, those old photographs are in color. It’s just the world was black and white back then... The world didn’t turn color until sometime in the 1930s, and it was pretty grainy color for a while, too.” In Calvin’s

father's joke, each kind of photograph is a true representative of a different reality. A black-and-white photograph of the colourful world of 2024 is deficient, just as a colour photograph of the black-and-white world in 1924 is deficient.<sup>1</sup>

In the same way, a photorealistic painting is a deficient representation of the sacred reality. It may look like the world you see, but it does not resemble reality seen from the deep ken, the reality of invisible beings. What appears to be an inaccurate image might in fact be an accurate representation of someone who does not look like a normal person. An apparently accurate image might be, at best, only a superficial reality limited to surface appearances.

The obvious explanations are that abstract images are either deficient or disinterested in reality. An equally possible solution is that reality has changed. Some medieval painters were not attempting to depict *our* reality, but a reality more real.

Although we see a gap between abstract, unnatural eastern icons and the world around us, medievals did not see a gap between those icons and the world around *them*. On the contrary, they were impressed by how lifelike their icons were. Scholars have generally concluded that the medieval Byzantines were so used to aping the ancients that they repeated ancient praise of ancient lifelike images, applying that same praise to their own art without making any new appraisals of their own. This is not quite right: time and again people saw normally invisible beings appearing with icon-like abstraction, and confirmed their identities by referring back to these supposedly abstract and unnatural icons. We can consider Byzantine visionaries as seeing their world as something like the modern film *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* (1988), a hybrid of abstract beings existing in a photorealistically depicted "normal" world.

Byzantine icons were so realistic, relative to a spiritual reality, that they could serve the function of today's photo identification.<sup>2</sup> In this cartoon (see Fig. 14.5), Tommy Carter's mother and father come to his school for parent-teacher night. Tommy's teacher is surprised at how non-photorealistic the parents are. He likely has just realized that Tommy's crude drawings of his presumably normal-looking parents were, in fact, accurate drawings of his crude parents. Tommy's drawings were realistic not despite their crude abstraction, but because of it.

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1 Bill Watterson, *Calvin and Hobbes* (29 October 1989), <https://www.gocomics.com/calvinandhobbes/1989/10/29>

2 Paroma Chatterjee, *The Living Icon in Byzantium and Italy: The Vita Image, Eleventh to Thirteenth Centuries* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2014), 56–62, <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9781139542401>; Robert Grigg, "Byzantine Credulity as an Impediment to Antiquarianism," *Gesta* 26 (1987): 3–9, [https://doi.org/10.1111/1540\\_6245.jaac42.4.0397](https://doi.org/10.1111/1540_6245.jaac42.4.0397); Robert Grigg, "Relativism and Pictorial Realism," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 42 (1984): 397–408, [https://doi.org/10.1111/1540\\_6245.jaac42.4.0397](https://doi.org/10.1111/1540_6245.jaac42.4.0397); Cyril Mango, "Antique Statuary and the Byzantine Beholder," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 17 (1963): 53–75 (65–66).



" HI, WE'RE TOMMY CARTER'S PARENTS...YOU MIGHT RECOGNISE US FROM HIS DRAWINGS OF US ?? "

Fig. 14.5 Doug Bentley, "Hi, we're Tommy Carter's parents" (2013)  
© www.CartoonStock.com. All rights reserved.

In the visual arts, perhaps more than other areas, we habitually privilege the plain ken by associating it with the "real." "Realism" is supposed to be an artistic sensibility that depicts its subject "truthfully," that is, in a way compatible with our everyday experience of spacetime, in contrast with the artificial and the stylized. Realistic subject matters tend towards the ugly or random; realistic styles erase themselves to position their product in opposition to "stylistic" art. "Realism" has less arrogant, less confident synonyms, such as "naturalism"—which still presumes that the plain ken is more natural—and "illusionism"—rather more honest in signalling that plain-ken art creates not reality, but an illusion of reality. Illusionistic painting claims, in Joost Keizer's description, that it "repeats a world already there; it does not show a world invented by the painter."<sup>3</sup>

If instead you look at reality through the deep ken, deep-ken art depicts reality more accurately. Instead of using "realism" in the normal art-historian sense, this book envisions two realisms, plain-ken and deep-ken realism. Deep-ken images look unworldly to us, but accurately depict beings like deities, both in intention and in the experience of those who have reported visions. The deep ken tries to get at the underlying reality, at the consonance between real subject and image. In the deep ken, "flat" has no negative connotations. Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood meditate helpfully on paintings with elements

3 Joost Keizer, *The Realism of Piero della Francesca* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), 34, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315553641>

from different time periods. An image can “double,” “bend,” and “fold” time.<sup>4</sup> Noa Turel notes that what we here call the deep ken was interested not in “immediacy” or objectivity, but in “tangible, material links to the sacred past.”<sup>5</sup> These were not photographs; they were better.

This book’s distinction, without preference, between the two kens undermines the conventional link between the plain ken and reality. In the visual arts, our two ways of seeing both become visible. Some artistic strategies and tactics portray the subject and its world in a deep-ken way, others in a plain-ken way. Indeed, plain-ken art appears real only to one looking at reality through the plain ken. Images that resemble our visible world, that depict deities as if they were people you would meet on the street in our own spacetime, appear real merely to the plain ken. Plain-ken realism appears as if it took place at a particular time-point in ordinary spacetime.

This chapter examines art created to be seen with the deep ken. In brief, deep-ken art is beautifully proportioned, indifferent to plain-ken particularities and limitations, and rich with consonance and meaning.

## Envisioning the Invisible

Where a strictly plain-ken view would show us what would be visible to a random passer-by, the deep ken includes or omits details to achieve a more meaningful perspective. Depictions of normally invisible saints and angels create a particular difficulty for artists. In Raphael’s (1483–1520) *Sistine Madonna* (ca. 1513–14) (see Fig. 14.6), our eyes hurry to the wistful cherubim at the bottom of the composition; where the green curtains are pulled back, the clouds take on semi-visible, translucent but distinct, faces. Raphael brings a plain-ken realism, both in the faces (Madonna’s beauty remains human, and is the more beautiful for its humanity) and in the expressions (the wistfulness of the cherubim). Raphael depicts these beings in a plain-ken-realistic way, by taking advantage of our ability to see images in nature, to see faces in amorphous smoke and clouds. Thus, ambiguous visual fields can be used to visualize the invisible. However, that we can clearly see half-clear faces suggests a crossing over to the deep ken, or at least a visualization of a human psychology.

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4 Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance* (New York: Zone, 2010), 9, 13–14, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1453n0p>

5 Noa Turel, “Living Pictures: Rereading ‘au vif,’ 1350–1550,” *Gesta* 50 (2011): 163–82, <https://doi.org/10.2307/41550555>



Fig. 14.6 Raphael, *Sistine Madonna* (ca. 1513–14), Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Wikimedia, public domain, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:RAFAEL\\_-\\_Madonna\\_Sixtina\\_\(Gemäldegalerie\\_Alter\\_Meister,\\_Dresden,\\_1513-14.\\_Óleo\\_sobre\\_lienzo,\\_265\\_x\\_196\\_cm\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:RAFAEL_-_Madonna_Sixtina_(Gemäldegalerie_Alter_Meister,_Dresden,_1513-14._Óleo_sobre_lienzo,_265_x_196_cm).jpg)

Some painters give us a privileged point of observation, making visible to us things and beings that remain invisible to other subjects in the painting. In Master I. A. M. of Zwolle's print of the *Mass of St. Gregory* (ca. 1480s), we share this privilege with a dog, and together we see souls in purgatory; the dog's perception of the souls illustrates their imperceptibility to the other, oblivious figures.<sup>6</sup> In Piero della Francesca's (d. 1492) *Dream of Constantine* (ca. 1447–66) only we and the sleeping Constantine can witness the angel bearing the cross aloft.<sup>7</sup> A miniature in the Prayerbook of James IV of Scotland (ca. 1503) has Queen Margaret (1489–1541) adoring the Blessed Virgin. Because the Queen is not a saint privileged with actual

6 Master I. A. M. of Zwolle, *Mass of St. Gregory* (ca. 1480s), British Museum, London, [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P\\_1850-0713-16](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1850-0713-16). See Christine Göttler, "Is Seeing Believing? The Use of Evidence in Representations for the Miraculous Mass of St. Gregory," *Germanic Review* 76 (2001): 121–42 (136).

7 "Constantine's Dream (c. 1466) by Piero della Francesca," *Archive* (2023), <https://www.artchive.com/artwork/constantines-dream-piero-della-francesca-c-1466/> San Francesco, Arezzo, [https://www.wga.hu/html\\_m/p/piero/2/4/4vision1.html](https://www.wga.hu/html_m/p/piero/2/4/4vision1.html).

bodily visions, the Blessed Virgin she—and we—see is not a vision that anyone standing nearby would have seen; it is a private vision, given to her imagination alone, to which the artist allows us access.<sup>8</sup> Paintings of patrons praying before saints sometimes have the former's eyes misaligned with the latter's bodies, as few worldly patrons would be able to actually see the normally invisible saints. The misalignment of eyes may reflect the idea that invisible beings were not intended to be seen, a hint at the duality of vision.

Two moments in the life of resurrected Jesus involve delayed recognition: Thomas doubting his reality, and Mary Magdalene misidentifying him as a gardener. Oblivious to the presence—oblivious to the viewer—of God, saints, and angels, Thomas still has two doubting fingers in Jesus's side-wound in a typical representation. Thomas's confusion, at the moment of its dispelling, can be portrayed by showing a particular instant in time, when his fingers confirm Jesus's wound.<sup>9</sup> Mary's confusion is more challenging artistically. The confirmation comes not in an action, that can be represented, but in words—Jesus calling her by name and warning her not to touch him. Although deep-ken depiction could visualize them in a text-scroll, words are difficult to render visually in plain-ken space. Therefore, the usual approach is to partially disguise Jesus's visual appearance, just enough to illustrate Mary's confusion, but not so much as to confuse viewers uncertain about the identity of this woman and this gardener. Titian's (ca. 1488/90–1576) portrayal, *Noli me Tangere* (ca. 1514), for example, gives Jesus a hoe, but x-ray analysis suggests that originally Titian wanted to deepen the illusion by giving him a gardener's hat as well. We have here hesitation over how to represent an illusion—or a delusion—visually.<sup>10</sup>

The Trinity also proved difficult to represent, leading to diverse portrayals. Jean Fouquet shows the Trinity as three identical Jesus-like men in the *Hours of Étienne Chevalier* (1450s) (see Fig. 14.7). Some Italian images of the Trinity depicted a three-faced Jesus with four eyes, the middle face sharing an eye with each side face (see Fig. 14.8).<sup>11</sup> Antonio Martini (d. 1433) produced a similar representation, with more distinct faces, in a fresco on a column of the Atri Cathedral. The

8 Gebetbuch Jakobs IV. von Schottland, Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. 1897, fol. 243v.

9 For example, the Master of the St. Bartholomew Altar, St. Thomas Altarpiece (1501), Wallraf-Richartz Museum, Cologne, Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Master\\_Of\\_The\\_St.\\_Bartholomew\\_Altar\\_-\\_St\\_Thomas\\_Altarpiece\\_-\\_WGA14629.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Master_Of_The_St._Bartholomew_Altar_-_St_Thomas_Altarpiece_-_WGA14629.jpg). See Rolf Wallrath, "Der Thomas-Altar in Köln: Zur Ikonographie des Thomaswunders," *Wallraf-Richartz-Jahrbuch* 17 (1955): 165–80.

10 Titian, *Noli me Tangere* (ca. 1514), National Gallery, London, <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/titian-noli-me-tangere>. See Cecil Gould, "A Famous Titian Restored," *Burlington Magazine* 100 (1958): 44–50.

11 See also the Trinity in the Chiesa di San Nicolao, Giornico (1478), Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Giornico\\_Chiesa\\_San\\_Nicolao\\_Affreschi\\_Abside\\_Trinit%C3%A0.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Giornico_Chiesa_San_Nicolao_Affreschi_Abside_Trinit%C3%A0.jpg)



same visualization was popular in Ethiopia, either independently invented or introduced by the Venetian immigrant painter Nicolò Brancalon (1460–1526).<sup>12</sup>



Fig. 14.7 Jean Fouquet, *Coronation* (1452–60), Bibliothèque et Archives du Château, Chantilly, MS 71, fol. 15, Wikimedia, public domain, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jean\\_Fouquet\\_-\\_The\\_Coronation\\_of\\_the\\_Virgin\\_-\\_WGA08028.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jean_Fouquet_-_The_Coronation_of_the_Virgin_-_WGA08028.jpg)



Fig. 14.8 Nicolao da Seregno, *Trinity* (1478), Chiesa di San Nicolao, Giornico, Switzerland, Wikimedia, public domain, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Giornico\\_Chiesa\\_San\\_Nicolao\\_Affreschi\\_Abside\\_Trinità.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Giornico_Chiesa_San_Nicolao_Affreschi_Abside_Trinità.jpg)

12 María José Friedlander, *Ethiopia's Hidden Treasures* (Addis Ababa: Shama, 2007).

The most famous Trinity image came from Russia (see Fig. 14.9). Andrei Rublev (ca. 1360–1430) enters the historical record in 1405, as a student of Theophanes the Greek (ca. 1340–1410), doing frescoes and icons for the Cathedral of the Annunciation in Moscow. His *Trinity* depicts the hospitality shown by the patriarch Abraham in feeding three visiting angels (Genesis 18). Exegetes had long understood this to refer to the Christian Trinity, and Abraham’s meal as a reference to the Eucharist. This is part of a long tradition, before it and after it, of Old Testament Trinities. Some of Rublev’s version is new. His table has a niche in front of it, for example, which echoes the contemporary practice of putting niches in altars for the Eucharist. Rublev’s depiction was frequently copied: the late-fifteenth century double-sided icon from the Novgorod Cathedral, the 1484–85 icon from the Monastery of St. Joseph of Volokolamsk, a Russian icon from Pskov (ca. 1500), and the early sixteenth-century version in the Makhreshchsky Monastery. In the sixteenth century, the Hundred Chapters Council under Grand Prince Ivan IV (1530–84) ruled that Rublev’s *Trinity* would now be the model for subsequent depictions of the Old Testament Trinity.<sup>13</sup>



Fig. 14.9 Andrei Rublev, *Trinity* (1411 or 1425–27), Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, Wikimedia, public domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Angelsatmamre-trinity-rublev-1410.jpg>

13 Gabriel Bunge, *The Rublev Trinity: The Icon of the Trinity by the Monk-Painter Andrei Rublev* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2007), 23, 35–43, 95–97; Georgy Petrovich Fedotov, *The Russian Religious Mind: Kievan Christianity, the Tenth to the Thirteenth Centuries* (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), 368; Priscilla Hunt, “Andrei Rublev’s Old Testament Trinity Icon in Cultural Context,” in *The Trinity-Sergius Lavra in Russian History and Culture*, ed. Vladimir Tsurikov (Jordanville, NY: Holy Trinity Seminary Press, 2005), 99–122 (99–102, 108–10); Vladimir Ivanov, *Russian Icons* (New York: Rizzoli, 1988), 57; Johannes Reimer, “Trinitarian Spirituality: Relational and Missional,” *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 75 (2019): 1–13, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v75i1.5348>; David Talbot Rice, and Tamara Talbot Rice, *Icons and Their History* (Woodstock: Overlook Press, 1974), 103.



Rublev projects the three angels onto a circle. He avoids unrealistic details that might distract: he omits all the tableware except the cup, for deep-ken reasons, to highlight it and its symbolic value. Scholars disagree on which angels correspond to which members of the Trinity. Despite having an inscription referring to Son, Father, and Spirit, the angels of the Zyrian Trinity, attributed to Stephen of Perm (ca. 1340–96) (see Chapter 7), cannot be decoded, as it is not certain that the order of the text was meant to match the order of the angels.<sup>14</sup> Three background objects resonate generally: the mountain with intellectual ascent, the tree with the Crucifixion, and the building with Abraham’s tent and the Temple. As Rublev probably practiced hesychasm himself (see Chapter 12), the blue colour in the icon may suggest the uncreated light of the hesychasts.<sup>15</sup> The image as a whole adopts an inverse perspective: instead of the shapes getting larger as they approach the viewer, the opposite occurs—a perspective that can even be persuasively animated through the miracle of linear algebra (see Fig. 14.10). This “reverse perspective” may suggest a theological truth, aligning the largest elements with the most distant ones, perhaps emphasising a proximity to heaven and the divine.<sup>16</sup>

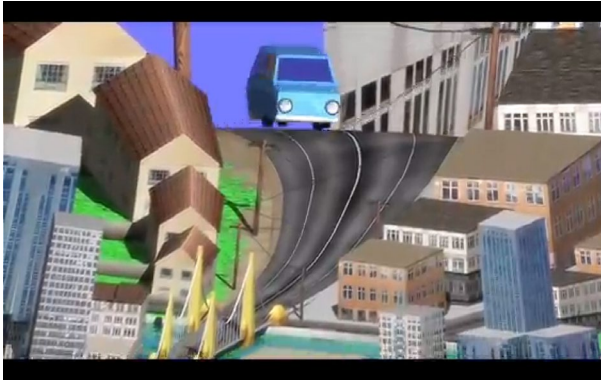


Fig. 14.10 Still (0:18) from Jeremy Mooney Somers, “True Reverse Perspective” (2009), online video recording, Vimeo (12 June 2010), CC BY-NC 4.0, <https://vimeo.com/12518619>

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- 14 Zyrian Trinity (fourteenth century), Vologda Historical, Architectural and Art Museum, Wikimedia, [https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Trinity\\_Zuryanskaya.jpg](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Trinity_Zuryanskaya.jpg)
- 15 Bunge, *The Rublev Trinity*, 32, 42–44; Hunt, “Andrei Rublev’s,” 113–18; Anita Strezova, *Hesychasm and Art* (Canberra: ANU Press, 2014), 194–95, <https://doi.org/10.22459/ha.09.2014>. For a source that downplays hesychast influence generally but still sees it in this work, see E. P. Buschkevitch, “The Limits of Hesychasm: Some Notes on Monastic Spirituality in Russia 1350–1500,” *Forschungen zur Osteuropäischen Geschichte* 38 (1986): 97–109.
- 16 See Oleg Tarasov, *How Divine Images Became Art: Essays on the Rediscovery, Study, and Collecting of Medieval Icons in the Belle Époque* (Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2023), 162–270, <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0378>

The most important point of divergence between plain-ken and deep-ken imagery can be seen with images of the Madonna and Child. If we misidentify these as plain-ken portrayals, we might see two humans. For the deep ken, however, there is just a Madonna, with the Child serving to make her recognizable, without himself having an independent existence. This is important for understanding the functionality of images perceived as realistic in the plain ken. What in English is a “Madonna and child” is more accurately called in Italian a “Madonna *with* [*con*] child” (subordinating Jesus) or, even better, a “Madonna.” Jesus is merely an attribute, an accessory, of Mary, one which helps communicate her identity. In some images of Mary holding the Baby Jesus while posing for Luke, if we peek at his work in progress, he is only painting Mary.<sup>17</sup> Bicci di Lorenzo’s (1373–1452) *Madonna and Child* (ca. 1430–31) inscribes the identification of Mary and two saints in their respective halos, but Baby Jesus’s halo does not include his name (see Fig. 14.11). Is his identification too obvious to write out, or is he not “really” there? One Associated Press story concerned a stolen “14<sup>th</sup>-century panel painting featuring the Virgin Mary with a child,” a child the reporter seemed unable to identify. In fact, the reporter inadvertently might have correctly understood the image with the deep ken, as a Madonna with a child accessory.<sup>18</sup> Theologically, this is all reasonable: the ubiquitous presence of Jesus on the altar—as well as his relationship to his mother—makes his dominance or even presence in a Madonna-with-child painting less necessary. In fact, artificial-intelligence techniques for identifying Mary images rely more on her veil than her baby.<sup>19</sup>

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- 17 For example, Rogier van der Weyden, *Saint Luke Drawing the Virgin* (ca. 1435–40), Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, <https://collections.mfa.org/objects/31035/saint-luke-drawing-the-virgin>
- 18 Brett Barrouquere, “Stolen 14<sup>th</sup>-century Art Recovered in Ky. museum,” *San Diego Union-Tribune* (23 May 2011), <https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/sdut-stolen-14th-century-art-recovered-in-ky-museum-2011may23-story.html>
- 19 Charles Hope, “Altarpieces and the Requirements of Patrons,” in *Christianity and the Renaissance*, ed. Timothy Verdon and John Henderson (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse UP, 1990), 544–45; Federico Milani and Piero Fraternali, “A Dataset and a Convolutional Model for Iconography Classification in Paintings,” *ACM Journal on Computing and Cultural Heritage* 14.4 (2021): 1–18 (13), <https://doi.org/10.1145/3458885>



Fig. 14.11 Biccini di Lorenzo, *Madonna and Child* (ca. 1430–31) (detail), State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, photograph by Sailko (2011), Wikimedia, CC BY-SA 3.0, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Biccini\\_di\\_lorenzo,\\_madonna\\_col\\_bambino\\_e\\_santi\\_giacomo\\_minore,\\_giovanni\\_battista\\_e\\_angeli.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Biccini_di_lorenzo,_madonna_col_bambino_e_santi_giacomo_minore,_giovanni_battista_e_angeli.JPG)



Fig. 14.12 *Virgin and Child, with Saints John and Christopher* (ca. 1440–70), Princeton University Art Museum, Wikimedia, public domain, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Saint\\_George\\_and\\_the\\_dragon,\\_and\\_Virgin\\_and\\_Child\\_with\\_Saints\\_John\\_and\\_Christopher,\\_diptych,\\_Netherlandish,\\_c.\\_1440-1470,\\_ivory\\_-\\_Princeton\\_University\\_Art\\_Museum\\_-\\_DSC06792.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Saint_George_and_the_dragon,_and_Virgin_and_Child_with_Saints_John_and_Christopher,_diptych,_Netherlandish,_c._1440-1470,_ivory_-_Princeton_University_Art_Museum_-_DSC06792.jpg)

What about paintings with more than one Jesus? These are necessarily deep ken. Understood with the plain ken, so that what looks like Jesus is an actual Jesus, such images are problematic, as they show two Jesuses in the same space simultaneously. However, when understood with the deep ken, the issue resolves: there are no actual Jesus here; each Jesus in such a painting is just an attribute and not a representation of Jesus himself. This Dutch ivory includes both Mary (with Jesus) and Christopher (with Jesus), for a total of zero (deep ken) or two (plain ken) Jesuses (see Fig. 14.12). Every part of this is done with the plain ken, but the overall composition (being able to put two Jesuses in the same frame) is deep ken, and there is in fact no Jesus here. The Arezzo monastery of Santa Fiore tried to commission Giorgio Vasari (1511–74) for an altarpiece intended for a chapel jointly dedicated to Christopher and Joseph. The envisioned composition included both a depiction of Saint Christopher and the Holy Family, each with a child accessory. This makes sense to the deep ken, but here Vasari understood art with the plain ken and objected to this *mostruosa* [monstruous] idea.<sup>20</sup>

## Beautiful Proportions

In some ways, deep-ken art was especially appropriate for capturing Jesus in his full beauty, as contemporaries understood Jesus and beauty both to be intertwined with an emphasis on proportionality and consonance. Lorenzo Ghiberti (1378–1455) insisted that “in all the visible modes” from painting to typography “proportionality makes beauty [*pulcritudine*] more than any other endeavour does.”<sup>21</sup> Similarly, in architecture Leon Battista Alberti (1404–72) defined beauty as “that reasoned harmony [*concinnitas*] of all the parts within a body, so that nothing may be added, taken away, or altered, but for the worse.” His beauty, appreciated through the deep ken, was “a great and holy matter,” not a result of human agency but simply “granted.” In some passages he ascribed protective properties to it: “Beauty may even influence an enemy, by restraining his anger and so preventing the work from being violated.” It is not clear whether this effect derived from human psychology (plain ken) or from some deep consonance (deep ken) between observer and art. His overall conceptualization, in any case, was deep ken, and his disdain for those who approach beauty in a plain-ken way was palpable: some believed that beauty “is judged by relative and variable criteria, and that the forms of buildings should

20 Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori ed architettori*, 14 vols. (Florence: Le Monnier, 1855), XI, 78.

21 Lorenzo Ghiberti, *Denkwürdigkeiten (I Commentarii)*, ed. Julius von Schlosser, 2 vols. (Berlin: Bard, 1912), I, 105–07.

vary according to individual taste and must not be bound by any rules of art. A common fault, this, among the ignorant—to deny the existence of anything they do not understand.”<sup>22</sup> Similarly, Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519) noted that painting, like music, geometry, and the human body, found its beauty in a harmony of proportions. Music, he wrote, concerned itself with the intervals between tones, just as painting explored the space between objects. Unlike arithmetic and its discrete whole numbers, music and painting involved “the proportions of continuous quantities,” the flow from one quantity to another.<sup>23</sup>

These ideas echoed in descriptions of Jesus’s beauty. Jesus’s earthly body was understood to be awesome and beautiful. Just before our period, Pseudo-Bonaventure (1221–74) marvelled at the “grace and shamefacedness” of his body, which made him the most beautiful of all men.<sup>24</sup> Margery Kempe (ca. 1373–1438) rated Jesus as “the handsomest man that ever might be seen or imagined.”<sup>25</sup> Filippo Brunelleschi (1377–1446) criticized Donatello (ca. 1386–1466) for putting “a peasant on the cross,” when in reality Jesus was “most delicate [*delicatissimo*] and in every part the most beautiful to ever have been born.”<sup>26</sup> A sixteenth-century French play put this idea into the mouth of a Roman soldier who, seeing Christ naked, praises his “beautiful, well-formed body [*beau corps et bien formé*].”<sup>27</sup>

## Extraordinary Space and Time

Artwork best seen with the deep ken can often be identified by its abandoning the plain-ken rules of spacetime. One ca. 1400 Serbian liturgical stole has a

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- 22 Leon Battista Alberti, *On the Art of Building in Ten Books*, trans. Joseph Rykwert, Neil Leach, and Robert Tavernor (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1988), 155–57. On proportion, see Peter Burke, *The Italian Renaissance: Culture and Society in Italy*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2014), 154–56.
- 23 Emanuel Winternitz, ed., *Leonardo da Vinci as a Musician* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1982), 210–16. Leonardo Da Vinci’s sense of continuous numbers came from Aristotle, who noted that time and space are both themselves continuous, “for it is possible to find a common boundary at which their parts join.” See Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. Hugh Lawson-Tancred (London: Penguin, 2004), 350 (Kappa 2); Aristotle, *Categories and De interpretatione*, trans. J. L. Ackrill (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1963), 12–13 (Categories, ch. 6); Thomas Brachert, “A Musical Canon of Proportion in Leonardo da Vinci’s Last Supper,” *The Art Bulletin* 53 (1971): 461–66.
- 24 Pseudo-Bonaventure, *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, trans. Isa Ragusa and Rosalie B. Green (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1961), 328; Iohannis de Caulibus, *Meditationes vite Christi olim S. Bonaventuro attributae* (Brepols: Turnhout, 1997), 265.
- 25 Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, trans. B. A. Windeatt (London: Penguin, 1985), 249.
- 26 Vasari, *Le vite de’ più eccellenti pittori*, III, 246.
- 27 Jean Claude Bologne, *Histoire de la Pudeur* (Paris: Orban, 1986), 223–24.

complex composition of Jesus's baptism. Jesus stands central, upright and naked. He appears to stand in front of, rather than "in," the Jordan River: nothing stands in front of his body; behind we see the river, and his form is outlined in pearls to highlight his exclusion from the environment. John stands further down the river, away from the viewer, but when he reaches out to Jesus his hand falls in front of Jesus's halo. Each man is surrounded by a string of pearls, further emphasizing his removal.<sup>28</sup> Both men exist outside of a single moment in ordinary spacetime.

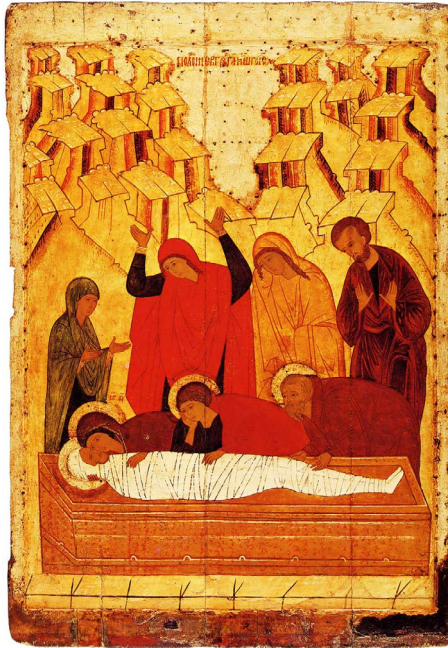


Fig. 14.13 Anonymous, *Entombment* (late fifteenth century), Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, Wikimedia, public domain, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Entombment\\_of\\_Christ\\_\(15<sup>th</sup>\\_century,\\_Tretyakov\\_gallery\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Entombment_of_Christ_(15th_century,_Tretyakov_gallery).jpg)

Deep-ken art can reshape the spatial world itself to better echo the meaning underneath the image. One illustration represents the Marian vision given to the Dominican nun Elsbeth Stigel (d. 1360). Mary had told Elsbeth that the

28 Svetozar Dušanić, *Serbian Orthodox Church Museum* (Belgrade: Serbian Orthodox Church, 2008), 8, fig. 3. The image is similar to a 1307 miniature in a manuscript of al-Biruni. University of Edinburgh, Or.Ms.161, fol.140v, [https://images.is.ed.ac.uk/luna/servlet/detail/UoEsha~4~4~64011~102971:Chronology-of-Ancient-Nations%2C-f-14?qvq=q:work\\_shelfmark%3D%27Or.Ms.161%27;lc:UoEsha~4~4&mi=93&trs=376](https://images.is.ed.ac.uk/luna/servlet/detail/UoEsha~4~4~64011~102971:Chronology-of-Ancient-Nations%2C-f-14?qvq=q:work_shelfmark%3D%27Or.Ms.161%27;lc:UoEsha~4~4&mi=93&trs=376)

mystic Henry Suso (1295–1366) spread the IHS around himself before offering it to her, Elsbeth, who shared it with others. This exchange occurs under the cloak of Eternal Wisdom who says, “into my godly protection shall I take those who carry my name Jesus in their longing.” The “my” name identifies Wisdom with Jesus. In the foreground, small people gesture towards the floating IHSs like children chasing blown soap bubbles. The wall is the cloak, the floor bends up to cup the people in its protection.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, this Russian entombment (see Fig. 14.13) has the environment bending reverently towards Jesus’s body; each side’s landscape echoes the sad curve of the mourners on that side. Other backgrounds achieved a colourful abstraction, almost five centuries before Piet Mondrian’s (1872–1944) experimentation, that intensifies the narrative scene by stripping away its context, as in this Armenian gospel (see Fig. 14.14).

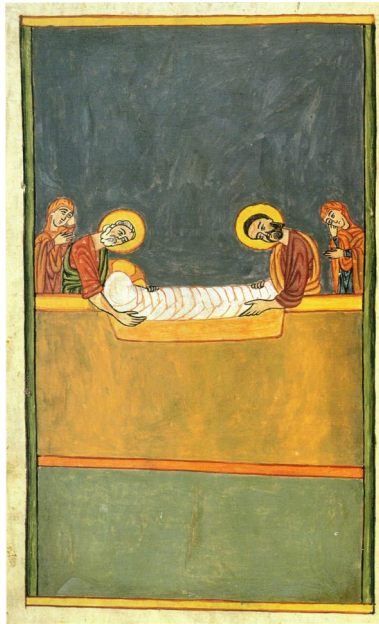


Fig. 14.14 Anonymous, *Entombment* (1437), British Library, London, MS Or. 2668, fol. 5v.

Liberated from the constraints of our spacetime, deep-ken art has no need to represent a single moment only. Different plain-ken moments could appear in

29 Einsiedeln, Stiftsbibliothek, Cod. 710(322), fol. 89r, <https://www.e-codices.unifr.ch/en/sbe/0710//89r>. See Ingrid Falque, “‘Daz man bild mit bilde us tribe’: Imagery and Knowledge of God in Henry Suso’s Exemplar,” *Speculum* 92 (2017): 447–92, <https://doi.org//doi.org/10.1086/690774>

the same frame. This might reflect an allegorical truth deeper than any historical coincidence. We might call this “polychronicity,” multiple times blended together.<sup>30</sup> We see something similar in film editing, too: a few seconds before a scene ends, we hear sounds from the subsequent scene, which sometimes reinforces meaning, although people in the first scene cannot hear the second one. These so-called “J-cuts” are common in film production today, replacing cruder alternatives like the “wipes” of earlier films such as *Star Wars*. In one episode of *Better Call Saul*, Mike spends a long day digging trying to find a body; the screen depicts a half dozen Mikes digging at the same time.<sup>31</sup> In such montage techniques, frames—actions in time—are cut together to show connections, and form a third idea that bridges the first and second shot. In Jesus paintings, the deep ken requires no cuts of any kind to bridge between Biblical events centuries apart.

Let us consider a range of examples. In Gentile da Fabriano’s (ca. 1370–1427) *Nativity* (1423), multiple stages of the journey are depicted at the same time.<sup>32</sup> One early-sixteenth-century Nativity set includes one Jesus laying on a blanket to be adored by the Magi, while Mary holds another Jesus (see Fig. 14.15).<sup>33</sup> Some images of the Mass of St. Gregory combine events from distinct times: for example, from outside the church, a first-century soldier, one of Jesus’s tormentors, pokes his head through the window so that he can spit on the sixth-century apparition of Jesus.<sup>34</sup> This phenomenon occurs also in Muslim art. This early fifteenth-century miniature, perhaps once illustrating a collection of Stories of the Prophets, *Qisas al-Anbiya*, is dominated by the giant ‘Uj (so large as to go out of the frame) being slain by Moses, but at the base is Muhammad (his face discretely covered by his turban) sitting among family members, and in the upper right is Mary holding the Baby Jesus. Each of the three prophets has a flaming halo. They are out of time, and indeed Jesus is not even an adult (see Fig. 14.16). Israhel van Meckenem’s (ca.

30 Marilyn Aronberg Lavin, *The Place of Narrative: Mural Decoration in Italian Churches, 431–1600* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 2, talks of monoscentic, polyscentic, and continuous compositions, and Franz Wickhoff, *Roman Art*, trans. S. Arthur Strong (London: Heinemann, 1900), 8–13, of continuous, isolating, and complementary ones.

31 “Slip,” *Better Call Saul*, season 3, episode 8 (5 June 2017).

32 Gentile da Fabriano, *Nativity* (1423), Uffizi Gallery, Florence, [https://www.wga.hu/html\\_m/g/gentile/adormagi/adormago.html](https://www.wga.hu/html_m/g/gentile/adormagi/adormago.html)

33 See Zuzanna Sarnecka, “‘And the Word Dwelt amongst Us’: Experiencing the Nativity in the Italian Renaissance Home,” in *Domestic Devotions in Early Modern Italy*, ed. Maya Corry, Marco Faini, and Alessia Meneghin, *Intersections* 59 (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 163–84, [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004375871\\_009](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004375871_009)

34 Göttler, “Is Seeing Believing?,” 120; Kathryn M. Rudy, *Rubrics, Images, and Indulgences in Late Medieval Netherlandish Manuscripts* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 127, <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004326965>



1445–1503) engraving shows Jesus eating at Emmaus in the foreground, and two other post-Resurrection scenes, each with its own Jesus, in the background, visible through the dining room's large open archways (see Fig. 14.17).



Fig. 14.15 Giovanni di Nicola di Manzoni di Colle (?), *Annunciation to the Shepherds and Adoration of the Magi* (ca. 1509–15), Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, <https://data.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/id/object/80700>. Photograph © The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.

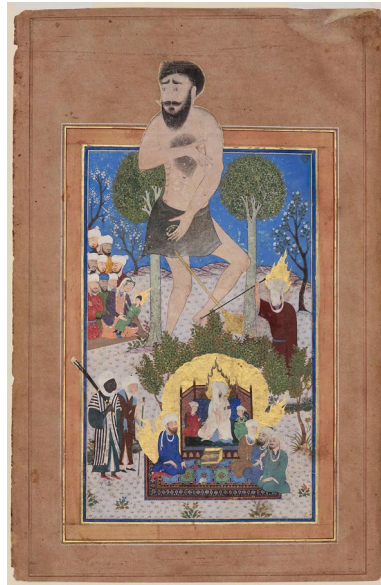


Fig. 14.16 *The Giant 'Uj and the Prophets Moses, Jesus and Muhammad*, MSS 620, Khalili Collections, <https://www.khalilicollections.org/collections/islamic-art/khalili-collection-islamic-art-the-giant-uj-and-the-prophets-moses-jesus-and-muhammad-mss620/>. Wikimedia, CC-BY-SA 3.0 IGO, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Khalili\\_Collection\\_Islamic\\_Art\\_mss\\_0620\\_rotated.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Khalili_Collection_Islamic_Art_mss_0620_rotated.jpg)



Fig. 14.17 Israhel van Meckenem, *Christ at Emmaus* (ca. 1480), National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, public domain, <https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.42003.html>

Some of the above examples of polychronicity were convenient. Others set up a new consonance, especially between the Old and New Testaments. While typically these incorporate the older history into the newer, Nicolas Froment's (ca. 1435–86) triptych of the *Burning Bush* (ca. 1475–76) moves time in the opposite direction, away from foreshadowing. Here the Madonna and Child appear amidst the Burning Bush, and in fact, despite their compositional centrality, are clearly situated in the Old Testament.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, the Nativity and the Passion were understood as symmetric bookends to Jesus's life, and the latter cast a long shadow over the former. Some Nativity depictions could be called proleptic, in anticipation of a later event, as if future events happened earlier. Earlier textual connections between birth and death may have been in the minds of some artists, for instance the *Golden Legend's* description of the star

35 Aix Cathedral, Aix-en-Provence, Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nicola\\_Froment,\\_Triptych\\_of\\_the\\_Burning\\_Bush,\\_1475,\\_Aix-en-Provence,\\_Church\\_Saint-Sauveur.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nicola_Froment,_Triptych_of_the_Burning_Bush,_1475,_Aix-en-Provence,_Church_Saint-Sauveur.jpg)

guiding the Magi to the Nativity as having “the shape of a most beautiful child over whose head a cross gleamed.”<sup>36</sup>

The essentially deep-ken links between different times were also depicted for the plain ken, through the use of specific symbols adding illusionism to the composition. Thus, a number of paintings with the deep ken combined the Nativity and the Crucifixion.<sup>37</sup> From the beginning of our period, images of the Madonna with Child often included details alluding to the Passion of Christ, which allowed for simultaneous depiction of Jesus’s life’s beginning and end. A sleeping Baby Jesus could prefigure the dead adult Jesus of the Lamentation.<sup>38</sup> In Giovanni Bellini’s (ca. 1430–1516) *Madonna of the Meadow* (ca. 1500–05), set amidst the fortified hills of northeastern Italy, a vulture perched in a leafless tree reinforces the connection between sleeping Baby Jesus and dead adult Jesus.<sup>39</sup> Bellini’s *San Zaccaria Altarpiece* (1505) sits the Madonna with Child on an octagonal pedestal, echoing ideas of birth and rebirth, for Jesus’s Resurrection occurred one day after the seventh day of the week.<sup>40</sup> Piero della Francesca bathes his *Madonna of Senigallia* (ca. 1470–74) in a plain-ken light; here Jesus wears a blood-red necklace with coral pendant—pointing to the Eucharist, and on a nearby shelf is a box for holding the consecrated host, which (in the plain ken) cannot exist during his birth.<sup>41</sup> Piero di Cosimo’s (1462–1522) *Madonna with Saints* (ca. 1493) has a floor in front of the Blessed Virgin’s throne that wants sweeping, with symbolic objects strewn as if each had been absentmindedly abandoned over the course of a day (thus, *in time*).<sup>42</sup>

Some images could stretch even further, linking the Passion not with the Nativity, but with the Fall, thousands of years earlier. Combining Genesis with

36 Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, trans. William Granger Ryan (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2012), 80, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400842056>

37 For example, Benedetto Bonfigli (attrib.), *Adoration of the Kings, and Christ on the Cross* (ca. 1470), National Gallery, London, <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/probably-by-benedetto-bonfigli-the-adoration-of-the-kings-and-christ-on-the-cross-and-christ-child-and-holy-heart> (ca. 1463–67), BSB Clm 692, fol. 102 bis v, <https://www.digitale-sammlungen.de/en/view/bsb00124327?page=216,217>

38 Sixten Ringbom, *Icon to Narrative: The Rise of the Dramatic Close-Up in Fifteenth Century Devotional Painting* (Doornspijk: Davaco Publishers, 1984), 61.

39 National Gallery, London, <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/giovanni-bellini-madonna-of-the-meadow>

40 San Zaccaria, Venice, Wikimedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/San\\_Zaccaria\\_Altarpiece#/media/File:Pala\\_di\\_San\\_Zaccaria\\_\(Venezia\).jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/San_Zaccaria_Altarpiece#/media/File:Pala_di_San_Zaccaria_(Venezia).jpg). See Richard Krautheimer, “Introduction to an ‘Iconography of Medieval Architecture,’” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 5 (1942): 1–33 (29).

41 Galleria Nazionale delle Marche, Urbino, Wikimedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Madonna\\_di\\_Senigallia#/media/File:Madonna\\_di\\_Senigallia.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Madonna_di_Senigallia#/media/File:Madonna_di_Senigallia.jpg)

42 Museo degli Innocenti, Florence, Wikimedia, [https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Madonna\\_and\\_Child\\_Enthroned\\_with\\_Saints\\_Piero\\_di\\_Cosimo.jpg](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Madonna_and_Child_Enthroned_with_Saints_Piero_di_Cosimo.jpg)

the Passion, one illumination in the Salzburger Missal depicts the Garden of Eden with a crucifix hanging in a tree bearing forbidden fruit and Eucharistic hosts (see Fig. 14.18). The *Stromu života* [Tree of Life] mural (ca. 1350–1400) in Žehra, Slovakia renders the Crucifixion cross also as the tree from which Eve takes fruit (see Fig. 14.19). That tree divides the composition into two spaces: on the right, the Synagogue rides a donkey, while, on the left, the Church rides a four-headed Gospel-beast. The right side's ADAM becomes INRI, Jesus's *titulus* (see Chapter 8), on the left.



Fig. 14.18 *Garden of Eden* (ca. 1455–94), Salzburger Missal, BSB Clm 15710, fol. 60v, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, CC BY-NC-SA, <https://daten.digitale-sammlungen.de/0004/bsb00045166/images/index.html?fip=193.174.98.30&id=00045166&seite=127>

Architecture can be a rich space for such connections. A 1430s Bologna fresco of the Adoration, perhaps by Paolo Uccello (1397–1475), portrays one of the stable's structural-support uprights as resembling a tree, which in turn would be associated with a cross. The Baby Jesus lies at its base, with the musculature of an adult male, and holding an orb with an alpha and omega, the first and

last letters of the Greek alphabet.<sup>43</sup> Hieronymous Bosch's (ca. 1450–1516) *Adoration of the Magi* (ca. 1494) includes objects that represented scenes from the Hebrew Bible. A Magus has offered Mary a sculpture of the sacrifice of Isaac, pre-echoing Jesus's own sacrifice. One Magus's mantle depicts Manoah and his wife's sacrifice, in anticipation of the birth of their own son, Samson (Judges 13). Looking forward more directly, the black Magus's thistle collar evokes Jesus's crown of thorns.<sup>44</sup>



Fig. 14.19 *Tree of Life* (late fourteenth century), Kostol Svätého Ducha, Žehra, Slovakia.

This “disguised symbolism” has been described as a “way to have spiritual depth without disrupting the surface of [apparent, plain-ken] reality.”<sup>45</sup> These

43 In San Martino Maggiore. Reproduced at Colin Eisler, “Surgi d’un mur démoli,” *Connaissance des Arts* 361 (1982): 70–74, and at Wikimedia, [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/97/Paolo\\_uccello%2C\\_adorazione\\_del\\_bambino%2C\\_bologna\\_01.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/97/Paolo_uccello%2C_adorazione_del_bambino%2C_bologna_01.jpg)

44 Museo del Prado, <https://www.museodelprado.es/en/the-collection/art-work/triptych-of-the-adoration-of-the-magi/666788cc-c522-421b-83f0-5ad84b9377f7>. See Reindert Falkenburg, “Para-typological Imagery in Hieronymus Bosch’s Prado Epiphany,” in *Visual Typology in Early Modern Europe: Continuity and Expansion*, ed. Dagmar Eichberger and Shelley Perlove (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018), 61–73; Matthijs IJssink, Jos Koldeweij, and Ron Spronk, *From Bosch’s Stable: Hieronymus Bosch and the Adoration of the Magi* (’s-Hertogenbosch: WBOOKS, [2018]).

45 Marcia B. Hall, “Savonarola’s Preaching and the Patronage of Art,” in *Christianity and the Renaissance*, ed. Timothy Verdon and John Henderson (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse UP, 1990), 493–522 (512–13).

Passion symbols survive plain-ken art's aversion to polychronicity, as the plain ken sees no polychronicity in them. The plain ken can visualize these symbols and invite a more deep-ken understanding of their invisible meanings. These are symbols hidden in plain sight.<sup>46</sup>

## Consonances

In the deep ken, consonance and dissonance substantially impact meaning. This was recognized at the time. Some contemporary theorists argued that consonance between the viewer's emotional state and the work itself was crucial for viewing. The Bohemian theologian Matthias of Janov (d. 1393/94), for example, argued that the effect of an image was due to the viewer's piety, not the painter's skill.<sup>47</sup>

We can also consider consonance between the materials used in the depiction and the subject being depicted. Some materials were earthy and unlovely. Urine was often employed for fermentation, as it released ammonia, and soaked rags smeared with urine-fermented pigments could also be useful. Others were expensive and powerful. The materials used in its creation could give an image additional value, in one of two ways. First, in a tradition going back to Theodore of Studite (759–826), the non-luxury simplicity of the media added spiritual value to the product. Second, expensive materials, like ultramarine, could also add spiritual value, for the opposite reason: a costly image of Jesus better depicted his awesomeness than a cheaply made one. Colours were the most direct way to add this material/spiritual value to an image. Colourants could be expensive, and, outside of major markets, were difficult to source. It is not a coincidence that Venetian paintings were famous for their colours, since that city was a commercial entrepôt. The importance of colour was well recognized from the beginning of our period. People were keenly aware of different hues, and of their relative costs. Despite treatises, such as those by Antoninus of Florence (1389–1459) and Alberti, ready to explain the symbolic connotations of different hues, there was no general agreement.<sup>48</sup>

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46 It is interesting that we get so many allegories here, as if art is not fully content with ceding the category of Madonna with Child to the Madonna alone. Much here is about Jesus, too, allegorically.

47 Matthias of Janov [Matěj z Janova], *Tractatus de Antichristo, Regulae Veteris et Novi Testamenti*, ed. Vlastimil Kybal, 5 vols. (Innsbruck: Wagner, 1911), III, 85–87.

48 Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988), 81–82; Herbert L. Kessler, *Spiritual Seeing: Picturing God's Invisibility in Medieval Art* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 85–86; Phoebe Stubbs, ed., *Colour in the Making: From Old Wisdom to New Brilliance* (London: Black Dog, 2013), 128.



The most powerful system of consonance between depicted and invisible objects and abstractions was what we might call symbols. This word is employed here carefully. Above, we have seen how symbols and time worked together in the deep ken. Of course, symbols served many other functions. This section looks at several unusual symbols and symbolic systems.



Fig. 14.20 Wolgemut workshop, *Jesus and the Animals* (1491), *Der Schatzbehalter*, Inc IV 440, TU Darmstadt, CC0 1.0, [https://tudigit.ulb.tu-darmstadt.de/trefferliste/detailseite?tx\\_dlf%5Bid%5D=14847&tx\\_dlf%5Bpage%5D=240&cHash=82420103f6c57527f55f87e06f07d9f8](https://tudigit.ulb.tu-darmstadt.de/trefferliste/detailseite?tx_dlf%5Bid%5D=14847&tx_dlf%5Bpage%5D=240&cHash=82420103f6c57527f55f87e06f07d9f8)

A number of images use animal consonance to represent aspects of Jesus or his environs. An initial in a manuscript of Guillaume Du Fay's (ca. 1397–1474) *Missa Se la face ay pale* ["If the Face Is Pale" Mass] depicts a nude woman windsurfing on a dolphin.<sup>49</sup> The ancient Greeks recognized the role of dolphins in carrying

49 Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Capp.Sist.14, fol. 27v, [https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS\\_Capp.Sist.14](https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Capp.Sist.14). This is the K of the first Kyrie. Anne Walters Robertson, "The Man with the Pale Face, the Shroud, and Du Fay's *Missa Se la face ay*

the souls of the dead to their afterlife, and the animal entered Christian iconography to represent salvation and Jesus.<sup>50</sup> One image in the *Schatzbehälter* [Treasury] (see Fig. 14.20) portrays Jesus surrounded by a symbolic zoo. From behind his halo burst virtuous beasts: a lamb (gentleness), a dove (purity), a pelican (faithfulness), and an elephant (bravery). Lunging at his legs are a bear (ferocity), a fox (hunger), a lion (boldness), and a dog (malice). Jesus here hopes to bring the virgin (representing the human soul) home to the lambs in the upper right plane.<sup>51</sup>

Vices and virtues are prominently featured in Jesus images. One type of Orthodox depiction of Jesus's Harrowing of Hell includes angels using liturgical fans, called ripidions or hexapterygons, to keep the demons at bay. The head of each ripidion is labelled with a virtue, such as mercy and humility, each consonating with an angel. The demons, like Beelzebub, and vices, like avarice, are labelled in the depths. Jesus reaches out to Adam and Eve to guide them out.<sup>52</sup> A more typical Jesus was located in the centre of a *Wheel of Life* (see Fig. 14.21), a diagram linking five lists with seven items each: the Seven Deadly Sins, the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit, the Seven Requests to Our Lord, the Seven Sacraments, and the Seven Virtues. The Swiss mystic Nicholas of Flüe (1417–87) used as his "book" a Lenten cloth that depicted Jesus surrounded by six narrative scenes from or associated with his life, each with an emblem representing a work of mercy.<sup>53</sup> Such programmatic images became more popular from the 1520s with the Protestant Reformation.

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*pale*," *Journal of Musicology* 27 (2010): 377–434 (415), <https://doi.org/10.1525/jm.2010.27.4.377>, sees a "rod" in her right hand; I believe it is a bridle.

- 50 Józef Cezary Kałużny, "Phoenix and Delphinus Salvator: The History of the Forgotten Images of Early Christian Iconography," *Perspektywy Kultury* 3 (2020): 17–23, <http://dx.doi.org/10.35765/pk.2020.3003.03>; H. Leclercq, "Dauphin," in *Dictionnaire d'Archéologie Chrétienne et de Liturgie*, ed. Fernand Cabrol, Henri Leclerc, and Henri Marrou, 15 vols. (Paris: Letouzey, 1907–5320), IV, part 1, cols. 283–95.
- 51 See Richard Bellm, *Wolgemuts Skizzenbuch im Berliner Kupferstichkabinett: ein Beitrag zur Erforschung des graphischen Werkes von Michael Wolgemut und Wilhelm Pleydenwurff* (Baden-Baden: Heitz, 1959), 29, 78, 85.
- 52 *Descent into Hell* (late fifteenth century), Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow. A similar image is Workshop of Dionysius, *Harrowing of Hell* (ca. 1502–03), State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg, [https://rusemuseumvrn.ru/data/collections/ikonopis/drzh\\_3094/index.php](https://rusemuseumvrn.ru/data/collections/ikonopis/drzh_3094/index.php)
- 53 See David J. Collins, *Reforming Saints: Saints' Lives and their Authors in Germany, 1470–1530* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008), 99–122, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195329537.001.0001>



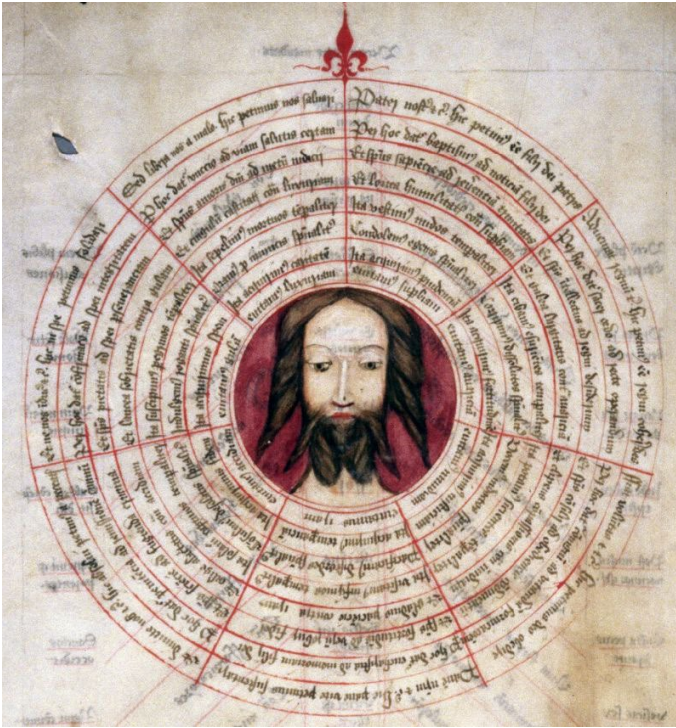


Fig. 14.21 *Wheel of Life* (early fifteenth century), BodL MS Laud Misc. 156, fol. 64v. Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, <https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/objects/d46eadb5-57f3-4cef-97fe-91bb48ace698/surfaces/29c59373-589a-4d02-b917-a95ad0790a99/>

Sometimes symbolic programs can become quite complex, technical, and subtle. A four-metre-long Swiss unicorn tapestry (1480), primarily wool, is particularly rich with Jesus symbols.<sup>54</sup> In the upper left portion, a lion faces its cubs. Animal descriptions of the ancient Christian text *Physiologus* note that lion cubs are born dead, and then resurrected by the breath of their father after three days, consonant with Jesus's own Resurrection.<sup>55</sup> Further to the right, Gabriel is walking his dogs Truth, Justice, Peace, and Mercy into an enclosed garden—Mary's womb—in which a pelican is perched, representing the Crucifixion.

54 "Hortus Conclusus" church tapestry (1480), Swiss National Museum, Zurich, <https://textiles.museumwnf.org/database-item/GALLERIES/sw/Mus01/14/en>

55 *Physiologus: A Medieval Book of Nature Lore*, trans. Michael J. Curley (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 4. Durand uses this to associate the lion with Mark, whose gospel emphasizes the Resurrection. See Guillaume Durand, *Prochiron, vulgo rationale diuinorum officiorum* (Lyons: Giunta, 1551), fol. 230v, 283r.

Then comes the main action of the tapestry: Adam (the first sinner) stabs the unicorn, a symbol for Jesus, but Mary catches the blood in a chalice. That is, Jesus's saving blood is saved. The Eucharistic imagery suggests the tapestry's use in conjunction with an altarpiece.<sup>56</sup>

Looking beyond a single work, we can find a similar complexity in a subject treated by many artists, such as Jesus being crushed by a winepress, with or in lieu of the grapes of God's wrath.<sup>57</sup> One engraving of the scene includes an empty scroll, to be filled in later, but already has blood painted in (see Fig. 14.22). Visual associations between Jesus and wine or grapes allowed for multiple consonances. A Flemish plate shows Jesus crucified to a grapevine, with God the Father, Mary, and the disciples standing by. The caption quotes Jn 15:5: *ego sum vitis vos palmites* [I am the vine, you are the branches].<sup>58</sup> A striking depiction of Jesus in the winepress appears on the closed outer doors of a late-fifteenth-century German triptych. A speech scroll around Jesus reads, *Vide si sit dolor ut dolor meus* [See if there is any pain like my pain] (Lamentations 1:12), and a caption at the bottom of the image also turns to the Hebrew Bible: *Nam pro te torcularcum sole calcavi* [For you alone have I stepped in the press], a loose reference to the Old Testament prophecy of Isaiah.<sup>59</sup>

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- 56 Jane Beal, "The Unicorn as a Symbol for Christ in the Middle Ages," in *Illuminating Jesus in the Middle Ages*, ed. Jane Beal (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 154–88, [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004409422\\_010](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004409422_010); Tobias Nicklas and Janet E. Spittler, "Christ and the Pelican: Function, Background and Impact of an Image," *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 92 (2016): 323–37, <http://dx.doi.org/10.2143/ETL.92.2.3154618>
- 57 David S. Areford, *The Viewer and the Printed Image in Late Medieval Europe* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 41–44; Peter W. Parshall and Rainer Schoch, ed., *Origins of European Printmaking: Fifteenth-century Woodcuts and Their Public* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 2005), 252–57 (no. 76–77).
- 58 *Crucifixion* (1430s), V&A Museum, London, <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O70833/plaque-unknown/>
- 59 *Mystic Winepress* (late fifteenth century), Mittelrhein-Museum, Koblenz, <https://theracolta.tumblr.com/post/622488247843553280/anonymous-middle-rhenish-master-mystic-winepress>. Another example is in Jakob Wolff, *Breviarium Romanum* (Basel: n.p., 1493), BSB Rar. 327-1/4 <https://www.digitale-sammlungen.de/view/bsb00079851?page=2,3>; see Achim Timmermann, "A View of the Eucharist on the Eve of the Protestant Reformation," in *A Companion to the Eucharist in the Reformation*, ed. Lee Palmer Wandel (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 363–98 (384–9), [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004260177\\_018](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004260177_018)



Fig. 14.22 Meester van het Martyrium der Tienduizend, *Jesus in the Winepress* (1463–67), Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, CC0 1.0, <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/collection/RP-P-1881-A-4687>

How did the winepress work? A passage from Isaiah (63:3–4) offered a powerful image of violence and winemaking: “I have trodden the winepress alone; from the nations no one was with me. I trampled them in my anger and trod them down in my wrath; their blood spattered my garments, and I stained all my clothing.” Medieval scholars understood this as a reference to Jesus and Eucharist wine—a deep-ken link between the Old and New Testaments—encouraging depictions of an angel using a winepress to squeeze the blood out of Jesus.<sup>60</sup> In one sense this is deep ken: it is an abstract schematic showing how a liturgical technology functions, even though no Bible narrative mentions Jesus trapped in a winepress. At the same time, the power comes from Jesus being trapped in spacetime: the only escape route from the three-dimensional confinement, collapsing as time passes, is as blood, through a pipe leading to the chalice. Some unknown genius came across a hydraulic table-sized fountain, which

60 For example, *Christ in the Winepress*, in Jakob Wolff, *Breviarium Romanum* (Basel: n.p., 1493), BSB MS Rar. 327, vol. 1, BOD-Ink B-897-GW 5165. Revelation 14:20 also mentions “the great winepress of God’s wrath,” which via Julia Ward Howe’s “The Battle Hymn of the Republic” (1861) gave a title to John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939).

could be used for wine, designed by Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528), and made what might have seemed a natural modification: he added Jesus as the Man of Sorrows, alongside putti holding the Crucifixion Arma, to turn the fountain into a tabernacle for the Eucharist. Some moulds were even made so that the winepress could be “pressed” to create a relief image,<sup>61</sup> creating consonance between the subject depicted and the artifact’s production process.

Sometimes symbolic consonance links elements within the image to some aspect of the context of that image. A decorative scheme can consonate with the main narrative image. One lectern cloth depicting the Cana wedding, where Jesus turned water into wine, is covered with stylized grape vines (see Fig. 14.23). A donor kneeling before a painting that depicts a donor kneeling before a holy figure creates consonance between the real and painted donors, and after the donor’s death his or her descendants can copy the gesture to expand the consonance through time. There can also be consonance between an image represented on an object and the purpose of the object. One coin minted in Ferrara in the early sixteenth century depicts on one side Alfonso I d’Este, Duke of Ferrara (1476–1534), and on the reverse a Pharisee displaying the coin to Jesus, with an inscription *que sunt Dei Deo* [what are God’s, to God] (Mt 22:21) (see Fig. 14.24). Titian’s 1516 painting *The Tribute Money* was used as a cover to Alfonso’s ancient-coin collection—a collection of historical antiques valued as historical antiques.<sup>62</sup> Archbishop Euthymius II of Novgorod (rl. 1429–58) presided over an artistic renaissance in the embroidery of funeral shrouds depicting Jesus’s entombment, creating consonance between the image on the shroud and the shroud’s purpose.<sup>63</sup> Some Nativity inkstands offset Jesus to allow space for the ink well. On an inkstand from ca. 1510, the caption *Verbum charo factum est* [The Word was made flesh] suggests a connection between Mary and the writer wielding the pen: each sought to give physical expression to

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- 61 Gothic Table Fountain (1495–1500), British Museum, London, [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P\\_SL-5218-83](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_SL-5218-83). See Gabriele Finaldi, *The Image of Christ* (London: National Gallery, 2000), 186–87; Jörg Rasmussen, “Untersuchungen zum Halleschen Heiltum des Kardinals Albrecht von Brandenburg (I),” *Münchener Jahrbuch der bildenden Kunst* 27 (1976): 59–118 (75–76). It is not extant, but may be reflected in the *Hallesches Heiltumsbuch* (1520), Aschaffenburg, Hofbibliothek, MS 14, fol. 4v.
- 62 The painting is in the Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Dresden, Wikimedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Titian\\_-\\_The\\_Tribute\\_Money\\_-\\_Google\\_Art\\_Project\\_\(715452\).jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Titian_-_The_Tribute_Money_-_Google_Art_Project_(715452).jpg). See Christopher J. Nygren, “Titian’s Christ with the Coin: Recovering the Spiritual Currency of Numismatics in Renaissance Ferrara,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 69 (2016): 449–88, <https://doi.org/10.1086/687607>
- 63 E. В. Игнашина, *Древнерусское шитье в собрании Новгородского музея* [*Old Russian Embroidery in the Collection of the Novgorod Museum*] (Novgorod: Novgorod State United Museum-Reserve, 2002), 5–7, 16–19.

formless words.<sup>64</sup> Fra Bartolomeo (1472–1517) places a statuesque, triumphant Jesus precariously on top of a paten-covered chalice, itself balanced on the framed text *salvator mundi* [the world’s saviour], itself situated atop a landscape tondo.<sup>65</sup> The “world” consonates with the landscape image, and “salvator” with the painting’s sponsor, the merchant Salvatore Billi.



Fig. 14.23 *A Lectern Cloth with the Marriage at Cana* (ca. 1400), National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, public domain, <https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.36522.html>

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- 64 Giovanni di Nicola di Manzoni (attrib.), *Nativity Inkstand* (ca. 1509–16), Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, <https://data.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/id/object/80698>; Giovanni di Nicola di Manzoni, *Nativity Inkstand* (ca. 1510), V&A Victoria & Albert Museum, London, <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O129396/inkstand-unknown/>
- 65 Fra Bartolomeo, *Christ with the Four Evangelists* (1516), Galleria Palatina (Palazzo Pitti), Florence, Wikimedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fra\\_Bartolomeo#/media/File:Fra\\_bartolomeo\\_03\\_Christ\\_with\\_the\\_Four\\_Evangelists.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fra_Bartolomeo#/media/File:Fra_bartolomeo_03_Christ_with_the_Four_Evangelists.jpg). See Sandra Richards, “From the Chapel to the Gallery: The Aestheticization of Altarpieces in Early Modern Italy” (PhD thesis, University of Toronto, 2013), 254–56; Victor I. Stoichita, *The Pygmalion Effect: From Ovid to Hitchcock* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 72–74.





Fig. 14.24 Gold 2 zecchino of Alfonso I d'Este (reverse) (1505–34), American Numismatic Society, New York City, public domain, <http://numismatics.org/collection/1937.146.35>

## Envoi

Modern eyes trying to see with a deep ken may project meanings onto an image, or miss meanings too subtle to recognize. Historians have debated the possibility that painters emphasized Jesus's genitals (see Chapter 15).<sup>66</sup> Certainly, the Baby Jesus sometimes puts one hand on or near his groin.<sup>67</sup> Certainly, Mary, or another adult, sometimes has a hand on, or gesturing towards, his groin.<sup>68</sup> These could be meaningful, or we could argue that hands need to be put somewhere and so statistically a number of them would be located near the crotch. In some images, Jesus's loincloth emphasizes his groin, both during and after the Crucifixion. Sometimes this appears so subtle as to be accidental.<sup>69</sup> Other instances might feature a large bow at his groin, or have a piece of cloth drape dramatically; both occur in Lucas Cranach the Elder's (ca. 1472–1553) *Crucifixion* (1503).<sup>70</sup>

66 Leo Steinberg, *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1988); Caroline Walker Bynum, "The Body of Christ in the Later Middle Ages: A Reply to Leo Steinberg," *Renaissance Quarterly* 39 (1986): 399–439.

67 Andrea del Sarto, *Tallard Madonna* (ca. 1513), Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, <https://www.hermitagemuseum.org/wps/portal/hermitage/digital-collection/01.+paintings/29566>

68 Bernard van Orley, *Virgin and Child with Angels* (ca. 1518), Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/437229>. See also Steinberg, *Sexuality of Christ*, figures. 4 and 13.

69 Mantegna, *Suffering Christ* (1490s), Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen, Wikimedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christ\\_as\\_the\\_Suffering\\_Redeemer\\_\(Mantegna\)#/media/File:Kristus\\_som\\_den\\_lidende\\_frelser.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christ_as_the_Suffering_Redeemer_(Mantegna)#/media/File:Kristus_som_den_lidende_frelser.jpg)

70 Alte Pinakothek, Munich, <https://www.sammlung.pinakothek.de/en/artwork/Qlx2dgbGXq>

I, with my native plain ken, would suggest that instances where the drapery piles up in a verticality suggesting an erection are merely accidental examples of placement; a loincloth has to be knotted somewhere. The best examples from our period are the Dürer workshop's *Lamentation* (ca. 1495)<sup>71</sup> and Ludwig Krug's *Man of Sorrows* woodcut (ca. 1510–32).<sup>72</sup> No evidence demands acceptance of an intentional genital emphasis in any of these, although it certainly could be the case. The symbols here, if they are symbols at all, were depicted so oriented towards the plain ken that their reality remains uncertain.

Indeed, one person's symbology is not another, which becomes problematic as artists travel. The Venetian painter Nicolò Brancalion (ca. 1460–1526) arrived in Ethiopia in the early 1480s and became an important painter there. There is a tradition that his painting the Baby Jesus in Mary's left arm caused offence to locals valuing right over left.<sup>73</sup>

Thus, time and distance can both erode the expressiveness and reliability of symbols, creating obstacles for the deep ken. As we will see in the next chapter, the plain ken, in contrast, zeroes in on time and space, creating both new possibilities and new limitations.

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71 Dresden Gemäldegalerie, <https://skd-online-collection.skd.museum/Details/Index/293082>

72 British Museum, London, [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P\\_1929-0211-3](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1929-0211-3)

73 Francisco Alvarez, *The Prester John of the Indies*, ed. C. F. Beckingham and G. W. B. Huntingford, trans. Henry Stanley (Cambridge, MA: Hakluyt Society, 1961), 332.

## 15. Art and the Plain Ken

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In Florence, one of the wealthiest cities of the Far West, something strange in the visual arts happened at the beginning of our period. Painters abandoned reality for illusion, and totality for restriction. The Florentines, and then the Far Westerners more generally, took a series of conventions rooted in an instant of time and deemed them normative. They appreciated that the immediately sensible world was experienced first one moment and then the next, and was full of ugly imperfections. They took those limitations and ugliness and celebrated them as art.

Even the illusionism of linear perspective, which was *the* breakthrough in Far-West art, had already happened in China, and been mocked. In the tenth century, Chinese painting achieved a technical and artistic excellence that allowed it to represent accurately the surface of reality.<sup>1</sup> The eleventh-century critic Shen Gua 沈括 condemned the linear perspective of the tenth-century painter Li Cheng 李成: “Should one attach paramount importance to the angles and corners of buildings?” Shen Gua favoured instead the traditional “angle of totality” that expressed more of a subject than its appearance from a limited perspective.<sup>2</sup> Thus, just as these artists achieved this technical illusionism, the art critics urged them forward, beyond mere representation. The most famous critic was Su Shi 蘇軾 (d. 1101):

If anyone discusses painting in terms of formal likeness [似]  
His understanding is nearly that of a child.

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- 1 James Cahill, *The Compelling Image: Nature and Style in Seventeenth-Century Chinese Painting* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1982), 27–28.
  - 2 This is an odd phrase in English, perhaps reflecting its ambiguity in Chinese: 以大觀小, literally, “using big to see little.” The much more eloquent “the angle of totality to behold the part,” Ernst Schwarz’s translation, has become standard in English-language scholarship. Recently, Zheng Li has translated it as “Macro Observation into Details” and linked it to Zhuangzi’s “macro observation with the perspective of taoism” (以道觀之). 郑笠, “‘以大观小’与‘以道观之’—论沈括式中国特色透视观与庄子观物态度之关联,” *闽江学院学报* (2012) 33: 73-78; Tsung Pai-hwa 宗白華, “Space-Consciousness in Chinese Poetry and Painting” [lecture delivered on 11 March 1949], trans. Ernst Schwarz, *Sino-Austria Cultural Journal* 1 (1949): 25–53.



Continuing, he asked, “If likeness alone can be valued, how much more so truth [真]?”<sup>3</sup> The clever absurdities that had been explored and, then dismissed, in the Chinese Core became acceptable, and then preferred, in the Periphery.

This narrative is less triumphalist than the traditional view of the Renaissance. Four of the most iconic paintings of all time were made within a thirty-year period around 1500, in a 900-km arc from Rome to Milan: the *Birth of Venus*, the *Creation of Adam*, the *Last Supper*, and the *Mona Lisa*. The Italian Renaissance stands as the turning point in the western art tradition, a breakthrough from the archaic abstraction of medieval icons into the “realism” that makes European art exceptional. In particular, the technique of linear perspective allowed artists to reduce a three-dimensional shape onto a two-dimensional canvas in a “realistic” way.

Instead, looking at Europe as a peripheral Far West gives us a global perspective. Shifting from a forward-looking early-modern framework to a late-traditional view lets us view their values for their own sake and within their own context, rather than solely for how they have led up to the present.

The previous chapter argued for the deep-ken realism of the archaic style. This chapter argues that the apparent realism of the Italian Renaissance is only real when seen with the plain ken. Where the previous chapter made a case for the logic of Jesus images seen with the deep ken, this chapter looks at Jesus images created with a plain-ken viewpoint. These images still impress viewers for their “realism,” especially in contrast to the earlier icons. These illusionistic images place their subject in a visual world that resembles our own, and so—neglecting how the depicted deities actually looked—appear less alien to us. In particular, this chapter considers the various techniques artists used to create these more plain-ken images of Jesus. In contrast to deep-ken consonance, these techniques often involved dissonant elements (words spelled backwards, sex workers modelling the Blessed Virgin). In contrast to deep-ken octaves, we see here the cacophony of everyday life.

This transformation happened in several ways, each of which is treated individually in this chapter. The plain ken intimated a limited visual space. Plain-ken images also constricted time into a line, by setting Jesus compositions in the fifteenth century, or, in some cases, the first century. Their artists modelled first-century beings on fifteenth-century humans; they emphasized the creation of their artworks in time by highlighting their status as artworks, whether by quoting other images, or by adding their own marks of individuality. The chapter concludes with the voices alarmed by the drawbacks and consequences of these innovations.

3 “論畫以形似，見與兒童鄰。” Susan Bush, *The Chinese Literati on Painting* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong UP, 2012), 32, 188 (her translation).

## Space

The most apparent feature of plain-ken art was its new attitude towards space. The fifteenth century saw the emergence of the first maps featuring graphical scales, enabling the precise measurement of distance on the map.<sup>4</sup> The architect Filippo Brunelleschi (1377–1446) and the sculptor Donatello (ca. 1386–1466) both used graph paper.<sup>5</sup> Painters included conspicuous imperfections to intentionally capture an accidental-looking moment, like a carefully composed “candid shot” on social media today. Natural light replaced light emanating from holy figures.<sup>6</sup> Some works employ multiple plain-ken tactics. We consider each of these facets of plain-ken depiction: linear perspective, awkward stagings, and natural light.

## Linear Perspective

The Florentines, independently rediscovering the technique of the medieval Chinese painter Li Cheng, found a plain-ken way to achieve a high degree of illusionism. The great challenge was reducing three-dimensional subjects to two dimensions.<sup>7</sup> One solution (frequently used, for example, for drapery) was to observe a model and reproduce the observation. Another solution (frequently used for representing space) was to observe and, bringing in some helpful mathematics, then use spatial lines.<sup>8</sup>

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- 4 Peter W. Parshall and Rainer Schoch, ed., *Origins of European Printmaking: Fifteenth-century Woodcuts and Their Public* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 2005), 259.
  - 5 Antonio Manetti, “Vita di Filippo di Ser Brunellesco,” in *Operette storiche edite ed inedite*, ed. Gaetano Milanese (Florence: Successori le Monnier, 1887), 94–95.
  - 6 We might call this “Bukharan” light: according to tradition, while most cities are illuminated by the sun, the holy city of Bukhara is not; it is Bukhara that illuminates the sun. Bukhara emitting light was seen by the Prophet on the mi’raj and by cosmonauts. See Maria Elizabeth Louw, *Everyday Islam in Post-Soviet Central Asia* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 65.
  - 7 At times, the artist is reducing a three-dimensional reality to a two-dimensional space curved into three dimensions. For example, Michele Giambono painted scenes (ca. 1432, ca. 1451) from the life of the Virgin on the barrel vault of the Mascoli Chapel, of the Basilica di San Marco, Venice. The result of the curved surfaces is that the architecture (at least in photographs) is morphed in a way usually seen in Orthodox reverse-perspective images. See Michele Giambono, *Birth of the Virgin* (1431–33), Wikimedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Michele\\_Giambono\\_-\\_Birth\\_of\\_the\\_Virgin\\_-\\_WGA08946.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Michele_Giambono_-_Birth_of_the_Virgin_-_WGA08946.jpg) and Michele Giambono, *The Visitation* (ca. 1451), Wikimedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Michele\\_Giambono\\_-\\_The\\_Visitation\\_-\\_WGA08947.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Michele_Giambono_-_The_Visitation_-_WGA08947.jpg).
  - 8 Fernando António Baptista Pereira, “Da narrativa na arte: espaço-tempo figurativo e historia na pintura pós-medieval,” *Cartema* 3 (2014): 277–301, <https://doi.org/10.51359/2763-8693.2014.251739>

As we have seen, there had long been a visual theory of perspective. Early-fourteenth-century artists frequently organized space in illusionistic ways. Already Duccio's (ca. 1255/60–1318/19) *Last Supper* (ca. 1311) has a fishbone perspective in which the orthogonals converge to a single *line* (rather than a convergent *point*), like the fish's ribs converging onto its spine (see Fig. 15.1). The representation of Florence at the base of the mid-fourteenth-century fresco *Madonna della Misericordia* in the Loggia del Bigallo shows light and shadow from a single instant of time.<sup>9</sup> In the *Institution of the Crib at Greccio* (1295), Giotto situates the viewer in the worst possible position with respect to a crucifix—behind it. We no longer see a crucifix as such, but we see merely a single view of the crucifix, a view ill-chosen with respect to the majesty of the crucifix, but one well-chosen if his goal was to locate the viewer precisely in a space.<sup>10</sup>

A new era in representation began in front of the Florence Baptistery around 1420, when Brunelleschi made a panel painting employing the first “true” perspective: orthogonals all converge at a single point, based on observation, with an axis perpendicular to the panel extending from the depicted building to the eye of the beholder. The proof, too, was found by observation, through the comparison of the viewed reality and a mirror reflection of the panel painting.

In the Far West around 1420 this painterly technique became fully wedded to the visual theory of perspective. Leon Battista Alberti (1404–72) added a layer of theory to Brunelleschi's experimentation to form the first definition and construction of perspective painting.<sup>11</sup> How does this work?

Alberti effectively constructed a three-dimensional grid. Stand at the back of an imaginary church, facing the altar, and note the lines running in three dimensions, the vertical pillars, the transversal pews, and the orthogonal aisles. All other lines in the church will be some combination of these. In Alberti's system, the vertical remained vertical on the picture plane, the transversal lines horizontal—but spaced with increasing density to suggest increasing distance—and the orthogonals converged at a single point, thus unifying spaces into a

9 *Madonna della Misericordia*, Loggia del Bigallo, Florence, Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Madonna\\_bigallo,\\_firenze\\_view.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Madonna_bigallo,_firenze_view.jpg)

10 Giotto, *Institution of the Crib at Greccio*, Basilica of San Francesco d'Assisi, Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Giotto\\_-\\_Legend\\_of\\_St\\_Francis\\_-\\_13\\_-\\_Institution\\_of\\_the\\_Crib\\_at\\_Greccio.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Giotto_-_Legend_of_St_Francis_-_13_-_Institution_of_the_Crib_at_Greccio.jpg). Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 143; Samuel Edgerton, *The Renaissance Rediscovery of Linear Perspective* (New York: Basic Books, 1975), 15; David Lindberg, *Theories of Vision from Al-Kindi to Kepler* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 148; Erwin Panofsky, *Die Perspektive als "Symbolische Form"* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1927), 38.

11 Edgerton, *Renaissance*, 40.

single space. This point Alberti called the “centre point,” but it has become better known in English as the “principal vanishing point.”<sup>12</sup>



Fig. 15.1 Duccio, *Last Supper* (ca. 1311), Museo dell’Opera del Duomo, Siena, Wikimedia, public domain, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Duccio\\_di\\_Buoninsegna\\_029.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Duccio_di_Buoninsegna_029.jpg)

Mathematics is rhetorically powerful, but it can be useful to question the apparent objective reality of perspective. In nature, distant things appear to be smaller than near things, but not all cultures operate in worlds where this equation is relevant: in the twentieth century, an Mbuti man leaving the dense

12 Brook Taylor, *Linear Perspective: Or, a New Method of Representing Justly All Manner of Objects as They Appear to the Eye in All Situations* (London: Knaplock, 1719). Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting*, trans. Rocco Sinisgalli (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2011), 39–42, <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511782190>, is somewhat in tension with this. See Edgerton, *Renaissance Rediscovery of Linear Perspective*, 26, 43.

rainforest for the first time saw tiny buffalo insects, in disagreement with his anthropologist, who thought they were normal-sized buffalo at a distance.<sup>13</sup>

Indeed, linear perspective comes with, and creates with, a number of non-obvious assumptions about space and about time. Linear perspective assumes that physical space is continuous, infinite, three-dimensional, homogenous, isotropic, quantifiable, and seen by a central (physically and psycho-spiritually) individual. There, those objects and spaces depicted have orientations, have insides and fronts, and have outsides and backs. Linear perspective assumes time can be frozen, that all the actors and props depicted, as well as the imagined viewer, can freeze at one moment. Given these assumptions, the illusionism of linear perspective impressively matches reality only if you stand at a distance, without moving, with one eye closed.<sup>14</sup>

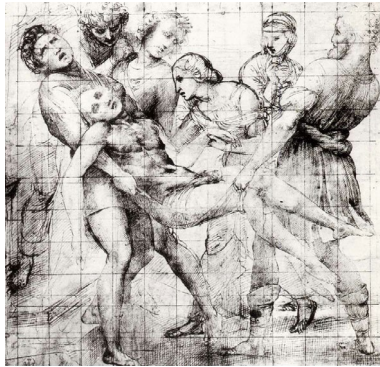


Fig. 15.2 Raphael, Study for the *Deposition of Christ* (1505), Gallerie degli Uffizi, Florence, Wikimedia, public domain, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Raffaello,\\_studio\\_per\\_la\\_pala\\_baglioni\\_03.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Raffaello,_studio_per_la_pala_baglioni_03.jpg)

Many theorists, from Alberti on, made a greater claim, that linear perspective mirrored a deeper reality, capturing the truth of the soteriological world: a mathematically ordered creation, through which grace radiated like light, where viewers were educated in salvific processes through images that clearly reflected these realities. Alberti claims that painting “has been enormously useful to religious sentiment [...] and to preserve minds with a certain intact devotion.” The images thus become representations of the better-than-worldly, and we can model our society based on these images; thus, society becomes

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- 13 Colin M. Turnbull, “Some Observations regarding the Experiences and Behavior of the BaMbuti Pygmies,” *The American Journal of Psychology* 74 (1961): 304–08 (305).  
 14 Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988), 33; Leonard Goldstein, *Social and Cultural Roots of Linear Perspective* (Minneapolis, MN: MEP, 1988), 20.

an image created to mirror these paintings.<sup>15</sup> Thus, the plain ken could reclaim deep-ken advantage through the triumph of geometric harmony.

The most interesting uses of the new plain-ken space come with Jacopo Bellini (ca. 1400–70), but in his sketches rather than his paintings.<sup>16</sup> Less dependent on patrons' demands and less expensive to work out, drawings were a place of experimentation. They were often used in-house, as stock patterns and models. Most drawings were overused, worn out, and lost to us, but Bellini's unusual experiments were valued by his contemporaries, and thus many survive, especially in the Paris (ca. 1430s–50s) and London (ca. 1450s–60s) albums.<sup>17</sup> Typically, his drawings have a spatial complexity that transcended the apparent unity of spacetime. Rather than a single vanishing point, his lines converge into a vague vanishing zone. Ancient architecture stands besides exemplars from the Venice of his own time, all edited by Bellini into new arrangements. In his *Baptism*, the landscape takes on a spatial complexity that resembles and replaces architecture, which perhaps has symbolic resonance: a classical pillar lies broken in the foreground, defeated by the new dispensation inaugurated by the Baptism.<sup>18</sup> In many drawings, the architecture totally dominates, dwarfing the apparently inconsequential religious figures and action.<sup>19</sup> In others, the landscape dominates, to similar effect.<sup>20</sup> One Crucifixion could have been much more focused on Jesus, who is actually in the foreground, but the artist has "stepped back" to better include the large crowds in the "shot." Art historian Alexander Nagel describes this feeling well, in reference to the Crucifixion in Bellini's *Road to Calvary* (ca. 1430s–50s): "in the moment it occurred, for the overwhelming majority of the inhabitants of Roman-dominated Jerusalem, it was simply another execution."<sup>21</sup> This image also positions the crosses at

15 Alberti, *On Painting*, 45. See Stuart Clark, *Vanities of the Eye: Vision in Early Modern European Culture* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), 85; Edgerton, *Renaissance*, 30–31.

16 Colin Eisler, *The Genius of Jacopo Bellini* (New York: H. N. Abrams 1989); Christiane L. Joost-Gaugier, "Jacopo Bellini's Interest in Perspective and Its Iconographical Significance," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 38 (1975): 1–28.

17 His son Gentile probably donated (in 1470–80) the Paris album to the Ottoman Sultan Mehmed II. Bernhard Degenhart and Annegrit Schmitt, *Jacopo Bellini: The Louvre Album of Drawings*, trans. Frank Mecklenburg (New York: George Braziller, 1984), 1–13.

18 Jacopo Bellini, *Baptism of Christ*, Louvre, Paris, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl020113170>

19 For example, the versions of Jacopo Bellini, *Flagellation*, Louvre, Paris, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl020111973>, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl020113155>, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl020113148>.

20 For example, Jacopo Bellini, *Christ Nailed to the Cross* (ca. 1430s–50s), Louvre, Paris, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl020113146>

21 Alexander Nagel, *The Controversy of Renaissance Art* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 148.

awkward, oblique angles.<sup>22</sup> The stables of Bellini's nativities are shown, perhaps unfinished, without walls, to better appreciate the space and perspective; in one instance, the stable is, like the cross, arranged obliquely.<sup>23</sup> The stables' instability reminds us of the fleeting plain-ken moment the images capture.

Similarly inventive are the preparatory drawings made by Raphael (1483–1520). Consider the drawings planning out the composition of his *Deposition* (ca. 1507).<sup>24</sup> One drawing, following an idea of Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519), finds depth by going beneath the skin, but only to represent the plain-ken subject more persuasively.<sup>25</sup> The figures are effectively see-through, like Bellini's Nativity stables. Another drawing uses a grid, which facilitates the transfer of the images to the larger painting, a process requiring an over-ten-times increase in scale (see Fig. 15.2).



Fig. 15.3 *Jesus and His Disciples Being Met by Two Men Who Ask for Forgiveness*, from the *Kulliyat* of Sa'di (1527), Walters Art Museum, MS W.617, CC0 1.0, <https://art.thewalters.org/detail/81172/jesus-and-his-disciples-are-met-by-two-men-who-ask-for-forgiveness/>

We find a more complex depiction, drawing on plain-ken and deep-ken senses of space, from the Islamic world. A 1527 Shirazi illustration of the *Kulliyat*

22 Jacopo Bellini, *Road to Calvary* (ca. 1430s–50s), Louvre, Paris, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl020113146>

23 For example, the versions of Jacopo Bellini, *Adoration of the Magi*, Louvre, Paris, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl020113182>, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl020113181>, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl020113180>

24 Francis Ames-Lewis, *The Draftsman Raphael* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1986), 51–53.

25 Raphael, *Study for the Deposition of Christ* (1498–1520), British Museum, London, [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P\\_1895-0915-617](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1895-0915-617)

[Complete Works] of Sa'di (d. 1292) depicts *Jesus and His Disciples Being Met by Two Men Who Ask for Forgiveness* (see Fig. 15.3). In this image, larger size corresponds not only to proximity to the viewer (plain ken) but also to absolute importance (deep ken). Jesus, in addition to the obvious halo, wears a more complex costume and the whitest and longest beard. The leftmost disciples, in maroon and yellow, are 90% of Jesus's height. The third disciple, in green, is 0.93 Jesus-heights, and the last disciple 0.87. These would be consistent with the disciples farther away from the viewer than Jesus—except that the orange petitioner (if he stood up) is also 0.90 Jesus-heights. It might be that 90% of a Jesus height is the standard depicted height for non-Jesus people, and the artist added  $\pm 3\%$  to give a plain-ken sense of relative distance.

The stigmatization of Francis of Assisi (d. 1226) creates particular problems in plain-ken space. Francis faces a crucified six-winged angel. In normal space, it is not possible for an observer to be positioned in a way that allows frontal view of two figures directly facing each other. A further complication arises in that lines typically connect each of the angel's wounds to each of Francis's. This creates a geometrical complexity, which can either be messy, or ignore the rules of plain-ken spacetime. Examples abound,<sup>26</sup> but we might look particularly at Giorgio da Saronno's sixteenth-century fresco which heightens the geometrical complexity by placing the stigmata lines above a tile floor that creates its own two-dimensional grid.<sup>27</sup>

Painters made complex choices about whether and how to use the techniques of linear perspective. One Madonna and Child includes a prayer, not depicted as a deep-ken speech-scroll, but rather carved in a location that is plausible to the plain ken—underneath a crossbeam. The geometry of linear perspective gives it a place both convenient and prominent, but the words themselves are not foreshortened—legibility trumped illusion. In the distance, God the Father can also be seen, in a small size reflecting the triumph of the rules of linear perspective over the deep-ken correspondence between importance and size.<sup>28</sup>

26 *Stigmatization of St. Francis* (ca. 1440), Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Dresden, <https://skd-online-collection.skd.museum/Details/Index/959675> and "Caspar," *Stigmatization of St. Francis* (ca. 1475), woodcut, BSB Rar. 327-1/4, <https://www.digitale-sammlungen.de/view/bsb00079851?page=20,21>. See David S. Areford, *The Viewer and the Printed Image in Late Medieval Europe* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 34–42, with reproductions at plate 3 and ill. 4.

27 Giorgio da Saronno, *St. Francis and St. Roch* (1522), Oratorio di San Salvatore, Casorezzo, <https://veronicaroute.com/1522/11/23/1522-3/>

28 *Virgin and Child with Saint Anne* (ca. 1520), Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest, <https://www.mfab.hu/artworks/33092/>. See Emöke Nagy, "Urban Patronage of Saint Anne Altars in Late Medieval Hungary," *Annual of Medieval Studies at CEU* 22 (2016): 161–62.



## Awkward Stagings

Plain-ken artists created a worldly dissonance by intentionally adding imperfections into their works. A straight-on angle is in some sense the “best”—or most perfect and deep-ken—form of representation, as it maximizes the visible surface of the object or person. In contrast, plain-ken painters used foreshortening to create an illusion of accidental glance, rather than capturing the subject at the “best” angle, or during a particularly dramatic moment. Foreshortening tends towards the plain ken: it is not the ideal front-on view, but rather suggests an awkward angle, as if the viewer happens to be looking, in time, while en route to a more central vantage point. Crucifixion images, for example, sometimes included a backwards “SPQR” flag (see Fig. 15.4), as if the painter “took a picture” at the wrong time, before the wind had a chance to blow the flag into a legible direction.<sup>29</sup>



Fig. 15.4 Raphael, *Christ Falling on the Way to Calvary* (ca. 1515), Museo del Prado, Madrid, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Christ\\_Falling\\_on\\_the\\_Way\\_to\\_Calvary\\_-\\_Raphael.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Christ_Falling_on_the_Way_to_Calvary_-_Raphael.jpg)

<sup>29</sup> See also Piero della Francesca, *Crucifixion* (ca. 1450–60s), Frick Collection, New York, Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Piero\\_crocifissione.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Piero_crocifissione.jpg) and *Crucifixion* (fifteenth century), Royal Collections Trust, <https://www.rct.uk/collection/403495/the-crucifixion>

Foreshortening can be used to emphasize the humanity and frailty of Jesus, as in Hans Baldung's (1484/85–1545) woodcut of the *Lamentation* (see Fig. 15.5). Andrea Mantegna's (ca. 1431–1506) *Lamentation* (ca. 1490) in Milan's Pinacoteca di Brera chooses a low angle to emphasize the anatomy, here the wounded anatomy, of Jesus.<sup>30</sup> In Mantegna's *Lamentation*, greater centrality and presence is given to Jesus's crotch and to his throat. Indeed, the concept of an Adam's apple, then current in Italian as "pomo d'Adamo,"<sup>31</sup> might link this throaty Jesus to Adam, his fore-figurer. The perspective here is imperfectly illusionistic: Jesus's feet are too small to be correct, but conveniently this means they do not get in the way, and they do not seem indecorously big.<sup>32</sup>



Fig. 15.5 Hans Baldung, *Lamentation* (ca. 1510), Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, public domain, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/336239>

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- 30 Andrea Mantegna, *Lamentation* (ca. 1480s?), Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan, Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The\\_dead\\_Christ\\_and\\_three\\_mourners\\_by\\_Andrea\\_Mantegna.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_dead_Christ_and_three_mourners_by_Andrea_Mantegna.jpg)
- 31 John Florio, *A Worlde of Wordes*, ed. Hermann W. Haller (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 497.
- 32 Dawson Carr, *Andrea Mantegna: Adoration of the Magi* (Los Angeles, CA: J. Paul Getty Museum, 1997), 47.

Many paintings from this period have these apparently awkward stagings. Fra Angelico's (ca. 1395–1455) bloodshot *Suffering Jesus* (see Fig. 15.6) has a doubly awkwardly placed halo: some of the writing is obscured by Jesus's head, and the top of the painting crops off the upper portion of the halo.<sup>33</sup> A distinctively Portuguese posing of the *Ecce Homo* (see Fig. 15.7) is striking for letting the hood cover Jesus's eyes, to be poked through by the crown of thorns. The hidden eyes suggest a later revelation, and the less-than-ideal view of Jesus's face suggests a plain-ken realism.<sup>34</sup> One of the panels of Michael Pacher's (ca. 1435–98) altarpiece centres on the hindquarters of a man collecting a stone to throw at Jesus, himself turned away from the action on the left edge (Jn 8:59).<sup>35</sup> In some depictions of Christ in Limbo, Jesus himself has turned his back to the viewer, so as to better peer into the depths of hell. In Benvenuto di Giovanni's (ca. 1436–1518) version, the devil is smashed like Wile E. Coyote, flat on his back, essentially the position Jesus would be in if he fell back ninety degrees, a move suggested by the fallen gate of hell (see Fig. 15.8).<sup>36</sup>

Jesus is hard to find in some images. A set of seven panels shows, from left to right, acts of giving food, giving drink, giving clothes, burying the dead, giving shelter, visiting the sick, and visiting the imprisoned. Jesus loiters, inconspicuously, a nondescript bystander in a plain-ken world of many nondescript bystanders, in five of the seven panels. The exceptions are the fourth—Jesus in heavenly glory oversees the burial of the dead—and the seventh—visiting prison, Jesus holds a globus cruciger in his left hand while blessing the prisoners with his right.<sup>37</sup>

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- 33 The crown's "barbs entered his venerable head so forcibly that his eyes became filled with flowing blood, his ears were blocked and both his face and beard seemed covered and saturated with his rose-red blood." Saint Birgitta, *The Revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden*, trans. Denis Searby, ed. Bridget Morris, 4 vols. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006–15), III, 235 (book 7, chapter 15). See Laurence Kanter and Pia Palladino, *Fra Angelico* (New York: Metropolitan Museum, 2005), 172–75.
- 34 Versions exist in the Museu Rainha Dona Leonor (Beja), Museu de Setúbal, Museu Diocesano de Palencia, Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, and the Igreja de Santa Cruz (Coimbra).
- 35 Michael Pacher, *Pacher-Altar* (detail) (1470s), parish church, St. Wolfgang im Salzkammergut, Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:St.\\_Wolfgang\\_kath.\\_Pfarrkirche\\_Pacher-Altar\\_Sonntagsseite\\_01.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:St._Wolfgang_kath._Pfarrkirche_Pacher-Altar_Sonntagsseite_01.jpg)
- 36 Andrea Mantegna, *Christ in Limbo* (ca. 1465), Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Kupferstichkabinett, <https://id.smb.museum/object/735030/christus-in-der-vorh%C3%B6lle>; Benvenuto di Giovanni, *Christ in Limbo* (ca. 1491), National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, <https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.41669.html>
- 37 Master of Alkmaar, *Seven Works of Mercy* (1504), Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/collection/SK-A-2815>. See C. J. de Bruyn Kops, "De Zeven Werken van Barmhartigheid van de Meester van Alkmaar gerestaureerd," *Bulletin van het Rijksmuseum* 23 (1975): 203–26.

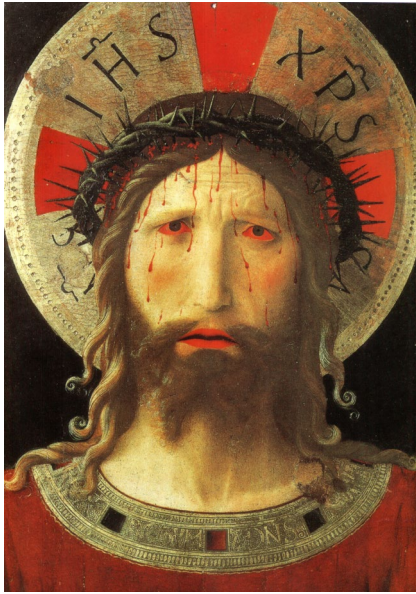


Fig. 15.6 Fra Angelico, *Suffering Christ* (ca. 1420–50), Santa Maria Del Soccorso, Livorno, Wikimedia, public domain, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Beato\\_angelico,\\_Cristo\\_coronato\\_di\\_spine,\\_livorno,\\_1420\\_circa.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Beato_angelico,_Cristo_coronato_di_spine,_livorno,_1420_circa.jpg)

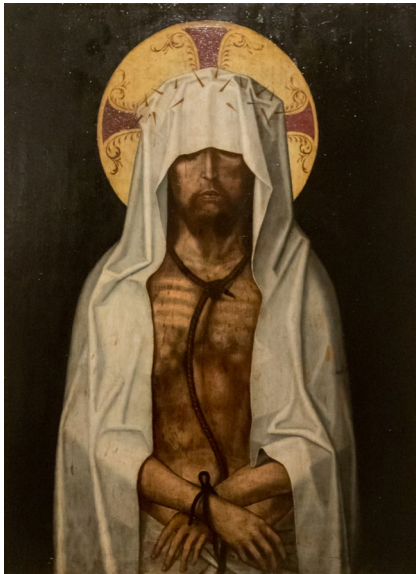


Fig. 15.7 *Ecce Homo* (sixteenth-century copy of an original from the fifteenth century), Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, Lisbon, Wikimedia, public domain, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lisboa-Museu\\_Nacional\\_de\\_Arte\\_Antiga-Ecce\\_Homo-20140917.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lisboa-Museu_Nacional_de_Arte_Antiga-Ecce_Homo-20140917.jpg)



Fig. 15.8 Benvenuto di Giovanni, *Christ in Limbo* (ca. 1491), National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, public domain, <https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.41669.html>

Albrecht Dürer's (1471–1528) 1510 print of the Ascension focuses on Jesus's followers on the ground. Most of Jesus is out of frame, with only his feet still visible at the top. That adverb "still" expresses the viewer's sense of an earlier moment where his knees could be seen too—the composition captures a moment of time with an easily imagined before.<sup>38</sup>

Sandro Botticelli (ca. 1445–1510) did not quite centre his ca. 1505 *Man of Sorrows*. In fact, Jesus's left eye is centred horizontally, which may contribute to the intensity of the gaze. His upper torso angles to the left, and his head takes up an additional slant in the same direction, so that a line that vertically bisects his face runs at a roughly four-degree divergence from the line that vertically bisects the picture space. The awkwardness suggests a plain-ken sense of space; perhaps Jesus was caught in motion, not quite settled into a symmetrical balance. Jesus's hair gets in the way of not only the angels that make up his halo, but also of the text around the neck of his gown, although enough is visible to be legible with extrapolation: [*Chr*]isto Iesu Nazareno R[egi Iudeorum].<sup>39</sup> Similarly, the Wurzach

38 The wood block is at the British Museum, London, [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P\\_1839-0608-3-50](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1839-0608-3-50). Prints include British Museum, London, [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P\\_E-3-71](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_E-3-71) and [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P\\_1895-0122-539](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1895-0122-539)

39 Botticelli, *Man of Sorrows* (ca. 1500), private collection, Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Botticelli\\_-\\_Man\\_of\\_Sorrows.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Botticelli_-_Man_of_Sorrows.jpg). Nagel reads the text in the ablative case; I propose a dative alternative, that this robe was made for Jesus, which lacks the subtle theology of the ablative, but fits the argument of a special purpose-made robe. See Alexander Nagel, "Christ in the Ablative: Botticelli's 'Man of Sorrows,'" *Sotheby's* (21 December 21, 2021), <https://www.sothebys.com/en/articles/christ-in-the-ablative-botticellis-man-of-sorrows>



Altar (1437) includes an image in which the weight of the cross pushes Jesus off centre, although he lifts his head to recover a more formal composition.<sup>40</sup>

Giovanni Bellini's (ca. 1430–1516) *Blood of the Redeemer* (1460s) sees Jesus's bloody hand blocking the relief sculpture on the parapet wall behind him. The sculpture represents a pagan sacrifice, with an inscription reading, *DIS MANIB[VS] AVRELIUS*, meaning "to the spirits of the departed, Aurelius," a common funerary inscription. Aurelius was a common name, perhaps an anachronistic reference to Emperor Marcus Aurelius, or perhaps to Marcus Aurelius Cotta Maximus Messalinus, an infamous senator around the time of Jesus's death. However, Jesus's hand blocks the visual focal point of the funerary ritual. This plain-ken awkwardness, however, has a deep-ken meaning: Jesus's own sacrifice has superimposed itself on previous pagan rites, rendering them irrelevant and, here, invisible.<sup>41</sup>



Fig. 15.9 Master of the Bartholomew Altar (workshop), *Descent from the Cross* (ca. 1495–1510), Philadelphia Museum of Art, John G. Johnson Collection, 1917, public domain, <https://philamuseum.org/collection/object/102556>

40 Hans Multscher workshop, *Jesus Carrying of the Cross*, Wurzach Altar (1437), Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen, Berlin, <https://recherche.smb.museum/detail/871660/die-kreuztragung-christi>

41 Giovanni Bellini, *Blood of the Redeemer* (1460s), National Gallery, London, <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/giovanni-bellini-the-blood-of-the-redeemer>. See Gabriele Finaldi, *The Image of Christ* (London: National Gallery, 2000), 182–83 (no. 71).

The *titulus* text that hung on the cross is frequently blocked in plain-ken art. The workshop of the Master of the Bartholomew Altar included the *titulus* (see Chapter 8) in its portrayals of the Descent from the Cross. Typically, these placed the ladder carelessly blocking the text, as in the Philadelphia exemplar (see Fig. 15.9). Another version, in Cologne, has the *titulus* not as a walnut panel, but as a piece of paper, curling on its right side to obscure the text missing in the actual relic itself.<sup>42</sup> In contrast, Michelangelo (1475–1564) had been dissecting bodies, according to Giorgio Vasari (1511–74), in the Santo Spirito hospital, and made for the hospital a crucifix (ca. 1493) as a thank-you. He restored the inscription to its imagined original state.<sup>43</sup>

### Natural Light

Natural light was a plain-ken technique recognized at the time. Bartolomeo Facio (d. 1459) describes a painted ray of light “which you would take to be real sunlight.”<sup>44</sup> Oil paintings, with multiple layers of paint, with multiple sizes of brushes, allowed for a precise depiction of light. Even supernatural light, as from the Baby Jesus, is depicted as akin to natural light. What is especially new here, in plain-ken art, is not the fact of light, nor that it is natural or supernatural. The innovation, in a spacetime where light can be blocked, is shadow.<sup>45</sup> Piero della Francesca (d. 1492) set his *Dream of Constantine* (1447–66) at night, and the angel is a source of light, casting shadows.<sup>46</sup>

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- 42 Master of the Bartholomew Altar (workshop), *Descent from the Cross* (ca. 1492–95), Wallraf-Richartz-Museum, Cologne, <https://www.wallraf.museum/en/collections/middle-ages/masterpieces/master-of-the-st-bartholomew-altarpiece-altarpiece-of-the-holy-cross-c-1490-1995/the-highlight/>. See Rainer Budde and Roland Krischel, ed., *Genie ohne Namen: Der Meister des Bartholomäus-Altars* (Cologne: DuMont, 2001), 408–413, cat. 78–80.
- 43 Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists*, trans. Julia Conaway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1991), 422. See Margrit Lisner, “The Crucifix from Santo Spirito and the Crucifixes of Taddeo Curradi,” *The Burlington Magazine* 122 (1980): 812–19; Richard Viladesau, *The Triumph of the Cross* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008), 58–59, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195335668.001.0001>
- 44 Michael Baxandall, “Bartholomaeus Facius on Painting: A Fifteenth-Century Manuscript of the *De Viris Illustribus*,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 27 (1964): 90–107 (102). This is the same Jan van Eyck portrait described as lacking only a voice.
- 45 Victor I. Stoichita, *Short History of the Shadow* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1999).
- 46 Piero della Francesca, *Constantine’s Dream* (ca. 1466), San Francesco, Arezzo, reproduced at *Archive* (2023), <https://www.artchive.com/artwork/constantines-dream-piero-della-francesca-c-1466/>

The effect is most striking in Nativities. Bridget of Sweden (ca. 1303–73) reported that in her visions Jesus was himself the source of intense light.<sup>47</sup> This inspired Nativity paintings where Jesus was the principal light source, sometimes also with luminescent angels appearing to shepherds in the background. Gentile da Fabriano's (ca. 1370–1427) *Nativity* (1423) shows a glowing Baby Jesus illuminating an intensely dark night scene.<sup>48</sup> Another example is a Dutch *Virgin and Child* where multiple sources of light, including the sun itself, create dramatic and complex shadows.<sup>49</sup> Hugo van der Goes (ca. 1440–82) did his own shadow-rich *Nativity*, now lost, that proved influential, as in versions from Michael Sittow's workshop (ca. 1510s).<sup>50</sup> More famous today is the ca. 1490 panel of Geertgen tot Sint Jans (ca. 1465–95). The austerity of the darkness, which may appeal to our modern eye, is in fact partly a modern alteration: the panel was burnt by a fire in 1904.<sup>51</sup> French miniaturist Jean Bourdichon (1457/59–1521) created some particularly evocative night images. His *Nativity* has three light sources: the star, a lantern, and Jesus himself.<sup>52</sup> In his 1520 *Nativity*, Baldung made the Baby Jesus the main interior source of light, creating ghostly shadows (see Fig. 15.10).<sup>53</sup> Baldung's composition is also illusionistic in that the focus is on a support pillar rather than on Jesus, splitting the space in half, with the animals commanding equal space as the Holy Family—but the eye is drawn to the latter precisely because of the light from Jesus.

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47 *The Revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden*, trans. Searby, ed. Morris, III, 251.

48 Gentile da Fabriano, *Nativity* (1423), Uffizi Gallery, Florence, [https://www.wga.hu/html\\_m/g/gentile/adormagi/adormago.html](https://www.wga.hu/html_m/g/gentile/adormagi/adormago.html)

49 Workshop of Robert Campin (Jacques Daret?), *Virgin and Child* (before 1432), National Gallery, London, <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/workshop-of-robert-campin-jacques-daret-the-virgin-and-child-in-an-interior>

50 Workshop of Michael Sittow, *Nativity* (ca. 1510s), Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna. Copies are in Barcelona and Saxony.

51 Geertgen tot Sint Jans, *The Nativity at Night* (ca. 1490), National Gallery, London, <http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/geertgen-tot-sint-jans-the-nativity-at-night>

52 Jean Bourdichon, *Kiss of Judas*, Paris, Musée Marmottan, MS 152, fol. 51v, Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jean\\_Bourdichon\\_-\\_Adoration\\_of\\_the\\_Magi\\_-\\_WGA02939.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jean_Bourdichon_-_Adoration_of_the_Magi_-_WGA02939.jpg)

53 Baldung Green, *Nativity* (1520), Alte Pinakothek, Munich, <https://www.sammlung.pinakothek.de/en/artwork/ma4dqanxrO/hans-baldung-gen-grien/die-geburt-christi>





Fig. 15.10 Hans Baldung, *Nativity* (1520), Alte Pinakothek, Munich, CC BY-SA 4.0, <https://www.sammlung.pinakothek.de/en/artwork/ma4dqanxrO/hans-baldung-gen-grien/die-geburt-christi>



Fig. 15.11 Bosch workshop, *Arrest of Christ* (ca. 1515), San Diego Museum of Art, Wikimedia, CC0 1.0, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The\\_Arrest\\_of\\_Christ\\_by\\_the\\_workshop\\_of\\_Hieronymus\\_Bosch,\\_c.\\_1515,\\_oil\\_on\\_panel\\_-\\_San\\_Diego\\_Museum\\_of\\_Art\\_-\\_DSC06632.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Arrest_of_Christ_by_the_workshop_of_Hieronymus_Bosch,_c._1515,_oil_on_panel_-_San_Diego_Museum_of_Art_-_DSC06632.JPG)

Even Jesus paintings without him as a glowing baby used plain-ken, natural light. In his *Saint Columba Altarpiece* (ca. 1455), Rogier van der Weyden (1399/1400–64) partially hides the star of the Nativity, letting its light shine on an incidental wall. These plain-ken flaws went too far for imitators, who in their own versions prominently displayed the full star (and removed the crucifix, for good measure).<sup>54</sup> Jan van Eyck's (d. 1441) *Madonna of Chancellor Rolin* (ca. 1435) has panels of glass roundels in the background wall to allow the illusion of more natural light to enter the room.<sup>55</sup> One ca. 1515 *Arrest of Christ* from the Hieronymous Bosch (ca. 1450–1516) workshop (see Fig. 15.11) loses Jesus's face amidst those of his tormentors; it stands out only by being less enshadowed than theirs. Most dramatically, halo and star merge into a fireball backlighting Jesus in Matthias Grünewald's (ca. 1470–1528) *Resurrection*, from the Isenheim Altarpiece (1512–16).<sup>56</sup> These paintings foreshadowed the luminance of the later Baroque period, which statistically developed a strong preference for the dark and the black, and for contrasts between light and dark.<sup>57</sup>

## Time

### Anachronism

The modern art theorist Pavel Florensky (1882–1937) talked about icons, deep-ken images, as a “testimony of eternity.”<sup>58</sup> In contrast, everything in plain-ken art must be seen happening at the same time. To the plain ken, a ticking clock

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- 54 Rogier van der Weyden, *Adoration of the Magi* (ca. 1455), Alte Pinakothek, Munich, <https://www.sammlung.pinakothek.de/en/artwork/jWLP07nxKY>. See Alfred Acres, “The Columba Altarpiece and the Time of the World,” *Art Bulletin* 80 (1998): 422–51.
- 55 Jan van Eyck, *Madonna of Chancellor Rolin* (ca. 1435), Louvre, Paris, Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:La\\_Vierge\\_du\\_chancelier\\_Rolin\\_-\\_Jan\\_van\\_Eyck\\_-\\_Musée\\_du\\_Louvre\\_Peintures\\_INV\\_1271.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:La_Vierge_du_chancelier_Rolin_-_Jan_van_Eyck_-_Musée_du_Louvre_Peintures_INV_1271.jpg)
- 56 Matthias Grünewald, *Resurrection* (1512–16), Unterlinden Museum, Colmar, Wikimedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isenheim\\_Altarpiece#/media/File:Grunewald\\_-\\_christ.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isenheim_Altarpiece#/media/File:Grunewald_-_christ.jpg)
- 57 Daniel Kim, Seung-Woo Son, and Hawoong Jeong, “Large-Scale Quantitative Analysis of Painting Arts,” *Scientific Reports* 4 (2014): n.p., <https://doi.org/10.1038/srep07370>; Krassimira Ivanova, Peter Stanchev, Koen Vanhoof, Milena Dobрева, “APICAS-Content-Based Image Retrieval in Art Image Collections Utilizing Colour Semantics,” in *Access to Digital Cultural Heritage*, ed. Krassimira Ivanova, Milena Dobрева, Peter Stanchev, George Totkov (Plovdiv: Plovdiv UP, 2008), 153–202 (193).
- 58 Павел Флоренский, “Иконостас” *Богословские труды* 9 (1972): 80–148 (111). See Oleg Tarasov, *How Divine Images Became Art: Essays on the Rediscovery, Study, and Collecting of Medieval Icons in the Belle Époque* (Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0378>

enters the picture frame, and freezes. Forcing the image to take place at a single time creates a new problem and opportunity—which time to choose? Some artists blended the time of Jesus with their own, into a single hybrid moment (anachronism). Other artists, fewer, began to attempt to depict only the time of Jesus, and used details to show this was a temporal, first-century event, not a deep-ken eternal truth (historicism). To our modern eyes, the first-and-fifteenth-centuries juxtaposition can blend well, but we might contrive to experience a contemporary viewer’s anachronistic shock by looking at a Jesus set in a century closer to our own, like Jean Béraud’s (1849–1935) *Magdalene* (see Fig. 15.12).



Fig. 15.12 Jean Béraud, *St. Mary Magdalene in the House of Simon the Pharisee* (1891), Musée d’Orsay, Paris, Wikimedia, public domain, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jean\\_Beraud\\_Simon\\_the\\_Pharisee.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jean_Beraud_Simon_the_Pharisee.jpg)

Contemporaries were aware of these issues. Leonardo da Vinci thought that using ancient garb for contemporary subjects would allow a painting to age gracefully, without the jarring fashion choices of the time at which the painting was executed.<sup>59</sup> The sculptor Antonio Filarete (ca 1400–69) fought against anachronism from the opposite direction. He used the obvious inappropriateness of depicting “Caesar or Hannibal [...] in the clothes that we wear today” to persuade painters that “when you make a figure of a man who has lived in our own times, he should not be dressed in the antique fashion but as he was.”<sup>60</sup>

59 *Leonardo on Painting*, ed. Martin Kemp, trans. Martin Kemp and Margaret Walker (New Haven, CT: Yale UP 1989), 152.

60 Filarete, *Treatise on Architecture*, trans. John R. Spencer, 2 vols. (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1965), I, 306.

Many pre-moderns were unperturbed by our sensitivity to anachronism. Christ was crucified in first-century Palestine, and this is a true fact. It is true today in Vancouver that Christ was crucified in first-century Palestine; it was true in seventeenth-century Amsterdam that Christ was crucified in first-century Palestine. This is a true fact at all times and all places, so we can paint it anywhere and anytime. We might think of apparently misplaced (or mis-timed) crucifixions as being crucifixes. We would not object to a crucifix in a sixteenth-century church on the grounds that Christ was not crucified in the sixteenth century.<sup>61</sup>

### Settings

A number of compositions locate first-century scenes in obviously contemporary settings. Albert van Ouwater's (d. 1475) *Raising of Lazarus* (1445) takes place in a contemporary church.<sup>62</sup> In the middle panel of Rogier van der Weyden's *Seven Sacraments* (1440s), the Crucifixion is set in a church with the Eucharist being performed at the altar in the background.<sup>63</sup> Justus van Gent (ca. 1410–80) painted an *Institution of the Eucharist* (ca. 1473) where the Last Supper is located in front of a table set as if for Catholic mass—it is in fact a Catholic altar, in a Latin church. Looming in the background are Federico da Montefeltro (with a red hat), his new son Guidobaldo being held behind him, and Caterino Zeno, who had been Venice's ambassador to the court the Aq Qoyunlu sultan.<sup>64</sup> One fifteenth-century manuscript from Tigray shows a number of images of Jesus's Passion (crowning with thorns, arrest, flagellation), probably inspired by Western art, but with Ethiopian adaptations: the crowning soldiers, in profile (which had negative connotations), have flattop haircuts, confirmed by contemporaries as a current style.<sup>65</sup> The length of the thorns may reflect the long acacia thorns of Ethiopia.<sup>66</sup>

61 For broader discussions of anachronism, see Thomas M. Greene, *The Vulnerable Text: Essays in Renaissance Literature* (New York: Columbia UP, 1986), 218–35; Zachary Sayre Schiffman, *The Birth of the Past* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 2011), 145–49.

62 Albert van Ouwater, *Raising of Lazarus* (ca. 1455), Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Wikimedia, [https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Ouwater,\\_Aelbert\\_van\\_-\\_The\\_Raising\\_of\\_Lazarus\\_-\\_c.\\_1445.jpg](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Ouwater,_Aelbert_van_-_The_Raising_of_Lazarus_-_c._1445.jpg)

63 Rogier van der Weyden, *The Seven Sacraments* (1440s), Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten Antwerpen, <https://kmska.be/en/masterpiece/christ-cross-and-eucharist>

64 Justus van Gent, *Institution of the Eucharist* (ca. 1473), Galleria Nazionale delle Marche, Urbino, Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Giusto\\_di\\_gand,\\_comunione\\_degli\\_apostoli,\\_1473-1474.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Giusto_di_gand,_comunione_degli_apostoli,_1473-1474.jpg)

65 Alessandro Zorzi, *Ethiopian Itineraries*, ed. O. G. S. Crawford (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 170.

66 Stanisław Chojnacki, *The "Kweráta re'esu": Its Iconography and Significance* (Napoli: Istituto orientale di Napoli, 1985), 7–12 (figs. 1–3).



Fig. 15.13 Gabriel Mälesskircher, *Maria Magdalena Washing Jesus's Feet* (ca. 1476), Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nuremberg, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0, <https://objektkatalog.gnm.de/wisski/navigate/4438/view>

Some plain-ken settings were domestic. One painting from Bavaria (1470s) shows Mary Magdalene anointing Christ's feet (Lk 7) (see Fig. 15.13). Its setting is unflinchingly contemporary. Jesus is feasting on pheasant. Kitchenware decorates the room, not the manuscript. A peasant-feather fly-whisk flabellum, which might be used in a mass, here has no religious context, despite being part of a religious image. Some depictions of Madonna and Child use a container of milk as a symbol, one that also makes plain-ken sense to have near a potentially thirsty infant (see Fig. 15.14).<sup>67</sup> In addition to being sweet and nourishing, milk was a symbol of sweetness and nourishment.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>67</sup> Similar works are in the Szépművészeti Múzeum, Budapest, the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Strasbourg, and the Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts, Brussels.

<sup>68</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Age* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1982), 110–69.



Fig. 15.14 Gerard David, *Madonna and Child with the Milk Soup* (ca. 1513), Musei di Strada Nuova, Genoa, Wikimedia, public domain, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gerard\\_David\\_-\\_Madonna\\_and\\_Child\\_with\\_the\\_Milk\\_Soup\\_-\\_Google\\_Art\\_Project.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gerard_David_-_Madonna_and_Child_with_the_Milk_Soup_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg)

In some such domestic spaces, time expresses itself in explicit or complex ways. Gabriel Mälesskircher (ca. 1425/30–95) placed the four evangelists in an explicitly contemporary domestic space adorned with tokens of popular devotion. Luke's cow and Mark's lion sit at their humans' feet like house-pets. Matthew's writing desk has the date (1478) next to a Veronica image (see Chapter 16), and Mark has hung an astrological chart—also dated 1478—on the wall, and affixed an IHS to his desk (see Fig. 15.15). In an extreme example, the Master of Flémalle's *Annunciation* (ca. 1415–25) has a print of St. Christopher with the Christ Child over the fireplace (see Fig. 15.16). Here, time eats its own tail: Annunciation precedes birth, which precedes Christopher carrying Jesus, which precedes the creation of the image, which was pinned up before the Annunciation. Deep-ken symbolism and plain-ken domestic anachronism could coexist and even reinforce each other.





Fig. 15.15 Gabriel Mälesskircher, *St. Mark the Evangelist* (1478) (detail), Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum, Madrid, <https://www.museothyssen.org/en/collection/artists/malesskircher-gabriel/saint-mark-evangelist>



Fig. 15.16 Master of Flémalle, *Annunciation* (ca. 1415–25), Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels, Wikimedia, public domain, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Robert\\_Campin\\_-\\_Annunciation\\_-\\_WGA14402.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Robert_Campin_-_Annunciation_-_WGA14402.jpg)

In the late fifteenth century, landscape backgrounds became more common in paintings.<sup>69</sup> Between *via cruces* and *sacra montes*, the Church made active use of landscape as something worshippers would move through, to recreate and participate in the life of Jesus. Painters could atopistically<sup>70</sup> (analogous to “anachronistically”) locate key scenes from the Gospel in settings known to them. They rarely sought to create a first-century Near West scene distinct from the world around them. Rather, narrative scenes unfolded before undisguised backgrounds that were obviously, conspicuously fifteenth-century Europe. The Sant’Anastasia Church in Verona has a fresco by Francesco Benaglio (ca. 1432–92) with Jesus preaching before a seascape teeming with modern vessels.<sup>71</sup> Observers could recognize the Casentino hills, east of Florence, behind Christ and the tall tree in Piero della Francesca’s *Baptism of Christ* (ca. 1448–50, discussed below). Konrad Witz (d. 1445/46) located his *Draft of Fishes* (1444) on the shores of Lake Geneva; the glaciers of Mount Blanc loom in the distance to the right (see Fig. 15.17). Pietro Perugino’s (d. 1523) *Baptism of Christ* (ca. 1482) shows Rome, identified by its Colosseum and Pantheon, in the background.<sup>72</sup> One Flemish painting of the wedding at Cana (see Fig. 15.18) features local families’ coats of arms in the stained-glass windows; the background of its sibling *Feeding of the Five Thousand* so precisely shows the state of the construction of the Antwerp Cathedral in the background as to allow dating both paintings to the 1490s.<sup>73</sup>

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69 Sixten Ringbom, *Icon to Narrative: The Rise of the Dramatic Close-Up in Fifteenth Century Devotional Painting* (Doornspijk: Davaco Publishers, 1984), 46.

70 I know of no use of “anatopism” in English until Coleridge in the early nineteenth century, but the Monteverdi opera *Proserpina rapita* [The Rape of Proserpine] (1630) was described at the time as an *anatopismo*.

71 Francesco Benaglio, *Jesus Teaching*, Sant’Anastasia church, Verona, Wikimedia, [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/19/Cappella\\_lavagnoli%2C\\_affreschi\\_di\\_francesco\\_benaglio\\_o\\_michele\\_da\\_verona\\_01.JPG](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/19/Cappella_lavagnoli%2C_affreschi_di_francesco_benaglio_o_michele_da_verona_01.JPG). See Stefano Zuffi, *European Art of the Fifteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006), 329.

72 Perugino, *Baptism of Christ* (ca. 1482), Sistine Chapel, Rome, Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pietro\\_Perugino\\_-\\_Baptism\\_of\\_Christ\\_-\\_Sistine\\_Chapel\\_-\\_cat13a.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pietro_Perugino_-_Baptism_of_Christ_-_Sistine_Chapel_-_cat13a.jpg)

73 *Wedding at Cana*, private collection, reproduced in *Genie ohne Namen*, ed. Budde and Roland Krischel, 476–77; *Feeding of the Five Thousand*, reproduced in Paul Pieper, *Die deutschen, niederländischen und italienischen Tafelbilder bis um 1530* (Münster: Westfälisches Landesmuseum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte Münster, 1990), 479–82.





Fig. 15.17 Konrad Witz, *Draft of Fishes* (1444), Musée d'Art et d'Histoire, Geneva, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Konrad\\_Witz.\\_Der\\_Wunderbare\\_Fischzug\\_\(1444\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Konrad_Witz._Der_Wunderbare_Fischzug_(1444).jpg)



Fig. 15.18 *Wedding at Cana* (ca. 1490s), private collection.

### *Illusionistic Devices*

Some paintings found ways to frame their subjects within a device existing in the depicted reality. Many Man of Sorrows featured a sill understood to be Pilate's balcony. A common example was the parapet used to invent a border between the depicted Jesus's space and the viewer's space, as in Antonello da Messina's (d. 1479) *Jesus Crowned with Thorns* (ca. 1470s).<sup>74</sup> Such parapets in paintings are

<sup>74</sup> Antonello da Messina, *Jesus Crowned with Thorns* (ca. 1470s), Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/435580>

fully plain ken, in that they create a sense of illusion, reinforced by a heightened sense of distance between subject and viewer. They create a border between the painting and our world, and give an explanation for why the two are different.<sup>75</sup> The most famous are the *Pietàs* of Giovanni Bellini. In one the frame is obviously part of the sepulchre; in another, Jesus is leaning on the parapet.<sup>76</sup>



Fig. 15.19 Giovanni Bellini, *Madonna of the Pear* (ca. 1486), Accademia Carrara, Bergamo, Wikimedia, public domain, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Giovanni\\_Bellini\\_-\\_Madonna\\_and\\_Child\\_-\\_WGA01696.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Giovanni_Bellini_-_Madonna_and_Child_-_WGA01696.jpg)

Some painters used a cloth of honour to structure the illusionary space between the subject depicted and the viewer. Bellini and Titian (ca. 1488/90–1576), his student, employed this technique in their ca. 1509–10 depictions of the *Madonna and Child*.<sup>77</sup> Each takes care to make the cloth itself illusionistic, with modelled folds (Titian's has been unfolded in his imagination, before being pinned up for the scene) and the interplay of light and shadow. Potentially, the cloth implies a

75 Ringbom, *Icon to Narrative*, 78. Similar frames were used by Andrea del Verrocchio (1435–88), Carlo Crivelli (ca. 1430), Ascoli Piceno (1480s, 1490s), Francesco Francia (1447–1517), and Vittore Carpaccio (ca. 1465–1526).

76 Giovanni Bellini, *Pietà* (ca. 1460–65), Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan, Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Giovanni-Bellini-Piet%C3%A0\\_\(1465\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Giovanni-Bellini-Piet%C3%A0_(1465).jpg)

77 Giovanni Bellini, *Madonna and Child* (1509), Detroit Institute of Art, <https://www.dia.org/art/collection/object/madonna-and-child-34522>; Titian, *Madonna and Child* (ca. 1510), Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, <https://www.khm.at/de/object/15d185eaa7/>

throne just off camera, although Bellini's the *Madonna of the Pear* (which includes an anterior parapet) shows that sometimes the cloth was understood to fall alone (see Fig. 15.19).<sup>78</sup>

Sometimes, smaller details served to distance and unify the worlds of the viewer and the depicted. One German *Veronica* (an altar predella) is a painting of the cloth, which is "attached" to the panel with illusionistic wax blobs.<sup>79</sup> In the *Feast of the Rosary*, Dürer (see Fig. 15.20) painted the Baby Jesus on a sheet, and added a larger-than-life-sized fly on the same sheet. The inclusion of the oversized fly, relative to the baby, was meant to represent a real fly on the painting itself.<sup>80</sup> The fly increases the sense that this is a painting rather than a reality. It also creates a layering of realities: our real world, behind which a painted fly understood to be of our world, behind which a painted Jesus in the portrayed world. Parapets and flies unify the depicted and real spaces.



Fig. 15.20 Albrecht Dürer, *Feast of the Rose Garlands* (seventeenth-century copy of 1506 original) (detail), National Gallery, Prague, Wikimedia, public domain, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rosenkranzfest\\_1606\\_-\\_1612\\_KHM\\_GG\\_1900.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rosenkranzfest_1606_-_1612_KHM_GG_1900.jpg)

Such strategies of representation speak in part to the plain ken—they locate events in a particular time and place—and in part to the deep—it is precisely the timelessness of these true events that allow them to happen anywhere, anytime.

78 See David Jaffé, ed., *Titian: Essays* (London: National Gallery, 2003), 74–77.

79 *Veronica* (ca. 1490), predella of the altar of the Söflingen Abbey, Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, Munich, <https://veronicaroute.com/1490/04/07/1490-8/>

80 The fly has disappeared from the original, but remains visible in copies. Jan Białostocki, *Dürer and his Critics* (Baden-Baden: Valentin Koerner, 1986), 20; Fedja Anzelewsky, *Albrecht Dürer: Das malerische Werk* (Berlin: Deutscher Verlag für Kunstwissenschaft, 1971), 93–94, 187–99.

### Contexts

More subtly, even invisibly, the artist's choice of subject and the meaning it conveyed were sometimes shaped by contemporary events. Federico da Montefeltro (1422–82) commissioned in 1472 from Piero della Francesca a *Mary with Child*, now known as the *Brera Madonna*: the Baby Jesus consonates with the newborn prince Guidobaldo, and to make the point clear the egg of an ostrich, the emblem of the Montefeltro family, hangs over Jesus from the ceiling.<sup>81</sup> Similarly, Masaccio (1401–28) created his *Tribute Money* in 1425, just when Florence was considering the creation of a new tax.<sup>82</sup>

Botticelli painted his *Mystical Nativity* under the influence of Girolamo Savonarola (1452–98). Indeed, the dancing angels flourished ribbons displaying the twelve privileges of the Virgin as outlined in Savonarola's Assumption Day sermon, which linked the Nativity of Jesus to the glory of Mary. Further, Greek text at the top reads:

This picture, at the end of the year 1500, in the troubles of Italy, I Alessandro, in the half-time after the time, painted, according to the eleventh [chapter] of Saint John, in the second woe of the Apocalypse, during the release of the devil for three-and-a-half years; then he shall be bound in the twelfth [chapter] and we shall see [him buried] as in this picture.<sup>83</sup>

The context of the painting blurs time: the year 1500's spiritual crisis, associated with future apocalypse, is ended with the birth of Jesus which has already happened, fifteen hundred years earlier.

Gentile Bellini's (ca. 1429–1507) *Miracle of the Relic of the Holy Cross at the San Lorenzo Bridge* (ca. 1500) (see Fig. 15.21) is a painting about an accident, and its solution. In 1369, Philippe de Mézières (ca. 1327–1405) donated a cross relic to the confraternity of San Giovanni Evangelista in Venice. During a procession in the 1370s, on the San Lorenzo bridge, the dense crowds' jostling upset the man bearing the relic, which fell into the canal, but it floated over the water. It resisted all attempts

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- 81 Piero della Francesca, *Brera Madonna* (1472–74), Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan, Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Piero\\_della\\_Francesca\\_046.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Piero_della_Francesca_046.jpg). See Robert Kirkbride, *Architecture and Memory: The Renaissance Studioli of Federico da Montefeltro* (New York: Columbia UP, 2008), 53.
- 82 Masaccio, *Tribute Money* (1425), Brancacci Chapel, Florence, Wikimedia, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Masaccio7.jpg>. See Peter Burke, *The Italian Renaissance* (London: Polity, 1987), 141.
- 83 Botticelli, *Mystical Nativity* (ca. 1500–01), National Gallery, London, Wikimedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Mystic\\_Nativity,\\_Sandro\\_Botticelli.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Mystic_Nativity,_Sandro_Botticelli.jpg). See Rab Hatfield, "Botticelli's Mystic Nativity, Savonarola and the Millennium," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 58 (1995): 88–114; Herbert P. Horne, *Botticelli: Painter of Florence* (New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1980), 293–301.

at rescue until Andrea Vendramin, an oil merchant and important confraternity member, jumped in, and swam to it with piety and dignity. The cross relic was an important tool for healing humans and for protecting ships in the Adriatic, including some of Vendramin's. The confraternity later commissioned from Bellini three paintings of the relic's miracles. Even while taking a dramatic moment of time illusionistically—the scene is big and confusing, with the action happening incidentally and thus accidentally—the painting is anachronistic. It depicts an event from a century earlier witnessed by prominent figures from the artist's own time: the group of men on the right include portraits of Gentile and Giovanni Bellini, as Queen Caterina Cornaro of Cyprus (1454–1510) kneels on the left.<sup>84</sup>



Fig. 15.21 Gentile Bellini, *Miracle of the Relic of the Holy Cross at the San Lorenzo Bridge* (ca. 1500), Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice, Wikimedia, public domain, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Accademia\\_-\\_Miracolo\\_della\\_reliquia\\_della\\_Croce\\_al\\_ponte\\_di\\_San\\_Lorenzo\\_-\\_Gentile\\_Bellini\\_-\\_cat.568.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Accademia_-_Miracolo_della_reliquia_della_Croce_al_ponte_di_San_Lorenzo_-_Gentile_Bellini_-_cat.568.jpg)

## Historicism

The end of our period sees some obvious attempts at historical cultural accuracy. In the Louvre *Circumcision* (Louvre, ca. 1520), perhaps done by Giulio Romano (d. 1546), we see the seven-lamp menorah and the helical, twisted columns of the Temple in Jerusalem.<sup>85</sup> Raphael's cartoon (ca. 1515) and tapestry (ca. 1519)

84 Patricia Fortini Brown, *Venetian Narrative Painting in the Age of Carpaccio* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1988), 150–52, 222, 227–33; Kiril Petkov, "Relics and Society in Late Medieval and Renaissance Venice: The Miracles of the True Cross at the Bridges of San Lorenzo and San Lio," *Cahiers de recherches médiévales et humanistes* 19 (2010): 267–82, <https://doi.org/10.4000/crm.12013>; Raimond van Marle, *The Development of the Italian Schools of Painting*, 19 vols. (New York: Hacker, 1970), XVII, 163–65.

85 Giulio Romano, *Circumcision* (ca. 1520), Louvre, Paris, <https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010062272>. This does not fit well with scripture, as Lk 2

of the *Healing of the Lame Man* (see Fig. 15.22) also featured Solomonic columns.<sup>86</sup> One engraving from the *Schatzbehalter* of Jesus's encounter with the adulterous woman decorates the Jerusalem Temple with stylized "oriental" writing.<sup>87</sup> Hems of garments featured a kind of writing that was "neo-Arabic" enough to give a sense of the Near West to eyes in the Far West.



Fig. 15.22 Raphael, cartoon for *The Healing of the Lame Man* (ca. 1515–16), Victoria and Albert Museum, London, Wikimedia, public domain, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:V%26A\\_-\\_Raphael,\\_The\\_Healing\\_of\\_the\\_Lame\\_Man\\_\(1515\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:V%26A_-_Raphael,_The_Healing_of_the_Lame_Man_(1515).jpg)

Through the fifteenth century, northern European art depicted Jerusalem as a northern European city. Contrary to geography, even as known at the time, Dürer in his *Lamentation* (ca. 1498) situated Jerusalem next to a major river.<sup>88</sup> Some images used visual clues to establish the city as Jerusalem or as generally oriental. One painting of the *Three Marys at the Tomb* (1420s) places Jerusalem in the background with a prominent seventh-century octagonal Dome of the Rock standing for the Second Jewish Temple of Jesus's day.<sup>89</sup> Here, the distinctively

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suggests the circumcision occurred before taking Jesus to Jerusalem.

- 86 Raphael, *Healing of the Lame Man* (ca. 1515–16), V&A Museum, London, <https://www.rct.uk/collection/912946/the-healing-of-the-lame-man>. See also the images and information available at "The Healing of the Lame Man: Raphael Cartoon and Tapestry," *Italian Renaissance*, <https://www.italian-renaissance-art.com/Lame-Man.html>
- 87 Published in Béatrice Hernad, *Graphiksammlung des Humanisten Hartmann Schedel* (München: Prestel, 1990), fig. 73.
- 88 Albrecht Dürer, *Lamentation* (ca. 1498), Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nuremberg, Wikimedia, [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/e4/Albrecht\\_Dürer\\_011.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/e4/Albrecht_Dürer_011.jpg)
- 89 Hubert van Eyck(?), *Three Marys at the Tomb* (1420s), Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, <https://rkd.nl/nl/explore/mages/2112>. See Reiner Hausserr, "Spätgotische Ansichten der Stadt Jerusalem (Oder: War der Hausbuchmeister in Jerusalem?)," *Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen* 29–30 (1987–88):



oriental look created a sense of the first century, even though the Dome was constructed over six centuries after the events depicted in the foreground. Information from the Bible made clear that the Temple had been rectangular; the octagonal temple here corresponded to the current reality, assumed to represent the ancient reality, and was distinctive in a way that made it feel more like a Temple. The Master of the Housebook also renders the Dome of the Rock in his *Lamentation* (after 1480), amidst other buildings with distinctively oriental flat roofs.<sup>90</sup> One illustration in a French manuscript of eastern travel accounts (1450s) shows the Dome of the Rock alongside the Holy Sepulchre and the Aqsa Mosque, all arranged arbitrarily.<sup>91</sup> Botticelli's *Temptations of Christ* (1480–82), in the Sistine Chapel, for its Temple used the eastern facade of Santo Spirito in Sassia, which was a hospital church.<sup>92</sup> The link with a hospital consonates with the action at the centre of the composition, where the leper healed by Jesus presents himself to Temple authorities (Mt 8:1–4). Other details served to establish an oriental locale. The city in Enguerrand Quarton's (ca. 1410–66) *Coronation of the Virgin* (1453–54) boasts circular tower tops, which saved the city from appearing too much like Villeneuve-lès-Avignon.<sup>93</sup> One German painting (ca. 1475–1500) of Jesus as Man of Sorrows includes an elephant, and a dome with a crescent (see Fig. 15.23).<sup>94</sup>

Jerusalem depiction reached a new stage in the 1480s, as artists progressed beyond portraying individual buildings and began to illusionistically represent the city as a whole. One German *Lamentation* (ca. 1483) places the drama beneath a detailed panorama of the city, with the Holy Sepulchre, the Dome of the Rock, and the Via Dolorosa. Tiny Jesus figures carrying the cross show the connections between various parts of the city.<sup>95</sup> In part, this represents the greater availability of knowledge. In 1486, Bernhard von Breydenbach's (ca. 1440–97) *Peregrinationes in Terram Sanctam* [Pilgrimages to the Holy Land] was

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47–70; Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance* (New York: Zone, 2010), 63–67.

90 Meister des Hausbuchs, *Lamentation of Christ* (after 1480), Gemäldegalerie, Dresden, <https://skd-online-collection.skd.museum/Details/Index/346526>

91 BnF MS Fr. 9087, fol. 85v, <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b100215049/f182.item.r=9087>.

92 Botticelli, *Temptations of Christ* (1480–82), Sistine Chapel, Rome, Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:05\\_Tentaciones\\_de\\_Cristo\\_\(Botticelli\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:05_Tentaciones_de_Cristo_(Botticelli).jpg)

93 Enguerrand Quarton, *Coronation of the Virgin* (1453–54), altar of the Chartreuse de Villeneuve-lès-Avignon, Wikimedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Enguerrand\\_Quarton,\\_Le\\_Couronnement\\_de\\_la\\_Vierge\\_\(1454\).jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Enguerrand_Quarton,_Le_Couronnement_de_la_Vierge_(1454).jpg)

94 See Carla Keyvanian, *Hospitals and Urbanism in Rome, 1200–1500* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 344–52.

95 Workshop of Wolfgang Katzheimer the Elder, epitaph for Adelheid Tucher (ca. 1483), Museum Tucherschloss und Hirsvogelsaal, Nuremberg, <https://www.bavarikon.de/object/bav:TKS-PAT-000000007000012;Haussherr,> "Spätgotische Ansichten," 63–66 has worked out the geography of the city.

published in Mainz, with illustrative woodcuts by Erhard Reuwich (1445–1505), including a detailed panorama of Jerusalem (see Chapter 5).<sup>96</sup> These herald a specificity that endured into the next century. Jan van Scorel (1495–1562) places a similarly exact Jerusalem in his ca. 1526 *Christ's Entry into Jerusalem*.<sup>97</sup>



Fig. 15.23 Master of the Aachen Marian Life, *Man of Sorrows* (detail) in *Life of Marie* (ca. 1475–1500), photograph by Triptych (2020), Wikimedia, CC BY-SA 4.0, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Marienleben\\_Aachener\\_Domschatz\\_linker\\_Flügel.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Marienleben_Aachener_Domschatz_linker_Flügel.jpg)

As the world became more globalized, aspects of the Core found their way even to the Far West. In some sense these were therefore modern—relatively recent, and relatively rare—but they came from the east. Because of a sense that time moved more slowly in eastern cultures, oriental details could serve as ancient details. One contemporary humanist commented, approvingly, on the Greeks having maintained the same fashion of clothes since the time of Jesus.<sup>98</sup> When icons came to the Far West, they were often taken as ancient, for this very reason. There is also a deep-ken overtone here, because many oriental, ancient objects were expensive in the fifteenth-century Far West, and therefore could symbolically project wealth.<sup>99</sup>

In the Far West, oriental carpets become popular in the fifteenth century, especially those from the South Caucasus region and Anatolia. Representations

96 Erhard Reuwich, *Panorama of Jerusalem* (1486), Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/338300>

97 Jan van Scorel, *Christ's Entry into Jerusalem* (ca. 1526), Centraal Museum, Utrecht, Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jan\\_van\\_Scorel\\_-\\_Triptych\\_with\\_The\\_Entry\\_of\\_Christ\\_into\\_Jerusalem\\_saints\\_and\\_on\\_the\\_outside\\_of\\_the\\_wings\\_patrons\\_of...\\_-\\_Google\\_Art\\_Project.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jan_van_Scorel_-_Triptych_with_The_Entry_of_Christ_into_Jerusalem_saints_and_on_the_outside_of_the_wings_patrons_of..._-_Google_Art_Project.jpg)

98 Vespasiano da Bisticci, *Le vite*, ed. Aulo Greco, 2 vols. (Florence: Istituto nazionale di studi sul rinascimento, 1970), I, 19.

99 Nagel and Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance*, 97–107.



in paintings seem to precisely represent actual rugs; some contemporary rugs have survived and match those in paintings. On the reverse of his *Portrait of a Young Man Praying* (ca. 1485), Hans Memling (ca. 1430–94) effected an early still life by arranging flowers in a majolica jug with the IHS monogram, atop a Caucasian rug.<sup>100</sup> The flat and hanging portions of the carpet have distinct vanishing points, suggesting that an optical projector was used for each half, refocusing the lens between them, rather than a unified, purely geometrical approach.<sup>101</sup> The Portuguese *Annunciation* in the Polyptych of the Convento da Madre de Deus (ca. 1515) places the action on top of a woven rug with a distinctive Kongo pattern (see Fig. 15.24).



Fig. 15.24 Workshop of Jorge Afonso, *Annunciation* (ca. 1515), Museu de Arte Antiga, Lisbon, photograph by Sailko (2016), Wikimedia, CC BY 3.0, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jorge\\_alfonso,\\_retablo\\_della\\_madre\\_di\\_dio,\\_1515,\\_04\\_annunciazione.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jorge_alfonso,_retablo_della_madre_di_dio,_1515,_04_annunciazione.jpg)

100 Hans Memling, *Portrait of a Young Man Praying* (ca. 1485), Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid, <https://www.museothyssen.org/en/collection/artists/memling-hans/flowers-jug-verso>

101 David Hockney, *Secret Knowledge* (New York: Viking, 2001), 64–65; David G. Stork, “Did Hans Memling Employ Optical Projections When Painting Flower Still-Life?,” *Leonardo* 38 (2005): 155–60, <https://doi.org/10.1162/0024094053722435> disagrees. On Hockey see Noa Turel, *Living Pictures: Jan van Eyck and Painting’s First Century* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2020), 13.



Fig. 15.25 Francesco Benaglio, *Madonna and Child* (ca. 1465–69), National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, public domain, <https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.1183.html>

Similarly, distinctive porcelains were rare enough to signify the Orient, and its wealth. These might be Chinese porcelains, or Islamicate copies of Chinese porcelains, that made their way to Europe. In the later fifteenth century, blue-and-white porcelain appears in Jesus paintings in Italy. The Book of Hours of Engelbert of Nassau (1470s–80s) decorates its borders with porcelains, two themselves decorated with the IHS initials.<sup>102</sup> Francesco Benaglio’s (ca. 1432–92) *Madonna and Child* (see Fig. 15.25), from the late 1460s, puts pears in a Jingdezhen lotus-pod porcelain, alongside other objects with symbolic resonance: a cherry and a coral necklace for Jesus’s blood, an apple for original sin. In Mantegna’s

102 BodL MS Douce 219, fol. 145v–46r has two IHS porcelains. The main illustrations are ca. 1470s, but the porcelains and other decorations are ca. 1480s. See fol. 153r, <https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/objects/5a7067a1-a61c-4bbc-bca7-f7b0fcee812c/surfaces/2255812c-dcc2-4ecb-a77f-fedf7591a332/> and fol. 200r, <https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/objects/12b9c3c8-7a8b-420e-a7dc-4af02b0a4348/surfaces/5aca9b54-e185-4eed-b650-df69e9021eb1/>. See Thomas Kren and Scot McKendrick, *Illuminating the Renaissance* (Los Angeles, CA: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2003), 134–37; Celia Fisher, “Flowers and Plants, the Living Iconography,” in *The Routledge Companion to Medieval Iconography*, ed. Colum Hourihane (London: Routledge, 2017), 453–64, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315298375-37>

*Adoration of the Magi*, from the end of the century, one of the Magi—himself eastern—offers Jesus gold coins in a Chinese porcelain cup.<sup>103</sup> Such objects could represent the East in a plain-ken way, but they were also rare enough to signify importance and wealth, and so could also with the deep ken enhance the majesty of the main subject.<sup>104</sup>



Fig. 15.26 Giovanni Bellini, *Presentation of Christ in the Temple* (ca. 1460) (detail), Fondazione Querini Stampalia, Venice, Wikimedia, public domain, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Giovanni\\_bellini,\\_presentazione\\_di\\_ges%C3%B9\\_al\\_tempio,\\_1469\\_ca.\\_01.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Giovanni_bellini,_presentazione_di_ges%C3%B9_al_tempio,_1469_ca._01.jpg)

Associated with Judaism, earrings evoked first-century Palestine. Mary wears an earring both in Giovanni Francesco Maineri's *Virgin and St. Joseph* (1489–1504)<sup>105</sup> and in Giovanni Bellini's updated version (ca. 1460) of Mantegna's (ca. 1454)

103 Andrea Mantegna, *Adoration of the Magi* (ca. 1495–1505), Getty Center, Los Angeles, <https://www.getty.edu/art/collection/object/103RHD>

104 Mirella Levi D'Ancona, *The Garden of the Renaissance: Botanical Symbolism in Italian Painting* (Florence: Olschki, 1977), 89–93, 296–99; Anne Gerritsen, *The City of Blue and White: Chinese Porcelain and the Early Modern World* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2020), 131–33, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108753104>; Jessica Harrison-Hall, "Early Ming Ceramics: Rethinking the Status of Blue-and-White," in *Ming China: Courts and Contacts, 1400–1450*, ed. Craig Clunas, Jessica Harrison-Hall, and Yu Ping Luk (London: The British Museum, 2016), 77–86; A. I. Spriggs, "Oriental Porcelain in Western Paintings, 1450–1700," *Transactions of the Oriental Ceramic Society* 36 (1964–66): 73–87 (73–74).

105 Giovanni Francesco Maineri, *Virgin and St. Joseph* (1489–1504), Museo del Prado, Madrid, Wikimedia, [https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Maineri-sagrada\\_familia.jpg](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Maineri-sagrada_familia.jpg)

*Presentation* (see Fig. 15.26).<sup>106</sup> Bellini painted this in Venice when Giacomo della Marca (1393–1476) was there preaching that the Jewish earring was the female equivalent of circumcision. As a Jewish symbol, the earring gave these images a cultural accuracy, in the plain-ken sense; at the same time, contemporary fashion had already opened the door, just, to upper-class Christian women wearing them.<sup>107</sup>

Romani peoples began appearing in Far Western art, and their ties to the Orient—the exonym “Gypsy” came from “Egypt”—allowed them to also represent the ancient.<sup>108</sup> A tradition developed of a man helping in the Descent of Jesus’s body from the cross, depicted with darker skin, a turban, and sometimes striped leggings.<sup>109</sup> A ca. 1460 copper engraving of the *Crucifixion* renders a similar man, crouched in what was perceived as a distinctively “Gypsy” posture, forging the nails to be used.<sup>110</sup> In his *Entombment* (ca. 1425), Robert Campin (d. 1444) has fitted Mary Magdalene with a flat turban, a Romani headdress, and faced her away from the viewer, giving us a better view of it.<sup>111</sup> Jacques Daret (ca. 1404–70), in his *Nativity* (ca. 1434–35), put a

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106 Giovanni Bellini, *Presentation of Christ in the Temple* (ca. 1460), Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bellini\\_maria1.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bellini_maria1.jpg). See Brigit Blass-Simmen, Giovanni Carlo Federico Villa, Neville Rowley, ed., *Bellini/Mantegna: Masterpieces Face to Face: The Presentation of Jesus at the Temple* (Milan: Silvana, 2018).

107 Diane Owen Hughes, “Distinguishing Signs: Ear-Rings, Jews and Franciscan Rhetoric in the Italian Renaissance City,” *Past & Present* 112 (1986): 3–59 (40–42, 58).

108 For background, see Miriam Eliav-Feldon, *Renaissance Impostors and Proofs of Identity* (New York: Palgrave, 2012), 121–36, <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137291370>; Erwin Pokorny, “The Gypsies and Their Impact on Fifteenth Century Western European Iconography,” in *Crossing Cultures: Conflict, Migration and Convergence*, ed. Jaynie Anderson (Melbourne: Miegunyah Press, 2009), 597–601; Erwin Pokorny, “Das Zigeunerbild in der altdeutschen Kunst: Ethnographisches Interesse und Antiziganismus,” in *Menschenbilder Beiträge zur Altdeutschen Kunst*, ed. Andreas Tacke und Stefan Heinz (Petersberg: Michael Imhof, 2011), 97–110; Margarita Torrión, “El traje antiguo de los gitanos: alteridad y castigo (Iconografía de los siglos XV–XVIII),” *Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos* 536 (1995): 19–42.

109 An early example is the triptych of the Master of Flémalle, as seen in the fragment in the Städel Museum in Frankfurt, and the copy in the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool. The Liverpool copy is reproduced on Wikimedia, here: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Descent-from-the-cross-CopyCampin.jpg>. The Frankfurt fragment is reproduced here on *Rational and Sensual Art*, <https://rational-sensual-art.tumblr.com/post/19901039883/master-of-flémalle-the-crucified-thief-around>.

110 Master of the Banderoles, *Crucifixion* (ca. 1450–75), Albertina, Vienna, [https://sammlungenonline.albertina.at/?query=search=/record/objectnumbersearch=\[DG1926/928\]&showtype=record](https://sammlungenonline.albertina.at/?query=search=/record/objectnumbersearch=[DG1926/928]&showtype=record).

111 Robert Campin, *Entombment* (ca. 1425), Courtauld Gallery, London, <https://courtauld.ac.uk/highlights/the-seilern-triptych/>

similar hat on Salome, the apocryphal midwife whose hand was paralyzed when she reached to verify Mary's physical virginity.<sup>112</sup> Derick Baegert's (d. after 1515) *Saint Veronica* (ca. 1478) may depict a Romani woman, with darker skin, a flat turban, and a pendant earring at the right edge, looking up at what might have been a Crucifixion in the original composition.<sup>113</sup> The grey-skinned soldier depicted in profile looking at Jesus in Bosch's *Ecce Homo* (ca. 1490) (see Fig. 15.27) may represent a Romani: beyond the skin colour, he also wears an earring and the flat turban.



Fig. 15.27 Hieronymus Bosch, *Ecce Homo* (ca. 1490), Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main, public domain, <https://sammlung.staedelmuseum.de/en/work/ecce-homo>

These depictions reflected their contemporary world—Romani are known to have been in Campin's Brussels in the 1420s—but also reached towards the eastern, more ancient, historical reality of the plain-ken Jesus. The historian Johannes Aventinus (1477–1534) recorded that Romani, living by “theft, rapine, and divination,” falsely claim that they were in exile from Egypt, where their

112 Jacques Daret, *Nativity* (ca. 1434–35), Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid, <https://www.museothyssen.org/en/collection/artists/daret-jacques/nativity>

113 Derick Baegert, *Saint Veronica* (ca. 1477–78), Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid, <https://www.museothyssen.org/en/collection/artists/baegert-derick/saint-veronica-and-group-knights>

ancestors had refused shelter to child Jesus after Herod's massacre.<sup>114</sup> Andreas von Regensburg (d. after 1442) was less specific, just noting their claims of origin in Egypt, which he linked to Jesus's Flight.<sup>115</sup>

Our period sees depictions of Africans playing a similar role in religious art. Over centuries a tradition developed that one of the Magi was a black African,<sup>116</sup> and Africans had long appeared in Far Western Jesus art, especially in the retinue of the Magus coming from the East to the Nativity.<sup>117</sup> In the middle of the fifteenth century, painters in the Low Countries gave one of the Magi, named Balthasar, subtle African features.<sup>118</sup> Mantegna is probably the earliest painter to emphasize those African traits on him (see Fig. 15.28). This style of depiction then became the norm, especially in Venice and Antwerp, culminating in the many *Adorations* that Gerard David (ca. 1460–1523) and his workshop made in the first quarter of the sixteenth century (see Fig. 15.29). Jan Gossaert's (ca. 1478–1532) *Adoration* (ca. 1512) honours Balthasar with a crown inscribed with his name,<sup>119</sup> suggesting increased interest in the Magus as an individual holy figure. In some depictions, the Magus appears Ethiopian and his attendant West African, perhaps reflecting difference in social status.<sup>120</sup>

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114 Johannes Aventinus, *Annales ducum Boiariae*, ed. Sigmund Riezler, *Sämmtliche Werke* 3, 2 vols. (Munich: Kaiser, 1883), II, 518 (book 7, ch. 25).

115 Andreas von Regensburg, *Diarium sexennale*, in *Sämmtliche Werke*, ed. Georg Leidinger (Munich: M. Rieger'sche Universitäts-Buchhandlung, 1903), 319. Later legends remembered a gypsy blacksmith who forged the Crucifixion nails. The thief of the fourth nail, intended to kill Jesus directly by piercing his heart, has been identified in other legends variously as a gypsy or as a Jew who became the progenitor of the gypsies.

116 Faustus of Riez, *Praeter sermones pseudo-eusebianos opera accedunt ruricci epistulae*, *Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* 21 (Prague: Tempsky, 1891), 253; John of Hildesheim, *The Three Kings of Cologne*, ed. C. Horstmann (London: Trubner, 1886), 237.

117 Lorenzo Monaco, *Adoration of the Magi* (ca. 1421), Uffizi Gallery, Florence, Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Don\\_Lorenzo\\_Monaco\\_002.2.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Don_Lorenzo_Monaco_002.2.jpg)

118 For example, Dieric Bouts, *Life of the Virgin* (ca. 1445), Museo del Prado, Madrid, <https://www.museodelprado.es/en/the-collection/art-work/triptych-of-the-life-of-the-virgin/ed28d5db-1f03-441e-bbc4-010786805dde?searchMeta=bouts>

119 Jan Gossaert, *Adoration of the Magi* (ca. 1512), National Gallery, London, <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/jan-gossaert-jean-gossart-the-adoration-of-the-kings>

120 For example, *Adoration of the Magi* (late fifteenth century), National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, <https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.41654.html>





Fig. 15.28 Andrea Mantegna, *Adoration of the Magi* (ca. 1463) from *Triptych*, Uffizi Gallery, Florence, Wikimedia, public domain, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Andrea\\_Mantegna\\_-\\_Trittico\\_-\\_Google\\_Art\\_Project.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Andrea_Mantegna_-_Trittico_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg)



Fig. 15.29 Gerard David, *Adoration of the Magi* (ca. 1520), Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, public domain, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/436104>

It can be difficult to say what counts as historicism and what as anachronism. Images with Turks (note the tall conical hats—alongside the turbans—in Mantegna’s *Adoration* above) are an attempt to create a historically realistic setting. However, there were no Turks at the time of Jesus’s birth; the contemporary Xiongnu might have been their ancestors, but they were 4,000 km away from Jerusalem. Is this anachronism, or badly done historicism?



Fig. 15.30 Titian, *Resurrection* (1520–22), Santi Nazaro e Celso, Brescia, Wikimedia, public domain, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Polittico\\_averoldi\\_01.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Polittico_averoldi_01.jpg)

A recognition that Jesus lived during the classical period allowed artists to use classicizing details to historicize. Mantegna in his *Holy Family with Saint John* (ca. 1500) poses a child Jesus like a classical statue, with something like a Roman cloak thrown over his shoulder.<sup>121</sup> One Venetian relief (ca. 1530) put Michelangelo’s *Risen Christ* in a classical context, presenting it as a part of the classical world with a style it sought to emulate.<sup>122</sup> This Christ was itself posed

121 Andrea Mantegna, *Holy Family with Saint John* (ca. 1500), National Gallery, London, <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/andrea-mantegna-the-holy-family-with-saint-john-the-baptist>

122 Erwin Panofsky, *Renaissance and Resuscitations in Western Art* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), 41 (published as the frontispiece). Maurice L. Shapiro, “Renaissance



in a classical *contrapposto* pose. Titian's Jesus in the central *Resurrection* of the Averoldi Polyptych (1520–22) puts weight on his right leg while bending his left knee, again in *contrapposto* position, and his outstretched arms echo the classical *adlocutio*, with a flag raised instead of a finger (see Fig. 15.30). That the classical also served as an ideal allowed a deep-ken power to underline what might look like a purely plain-ken approach. One (1520s?) plaquette of the *Washing of the Disciples' Feet* classicizes the clothing and architecture: here, the historical accident of Jesus living during a time later considered normative meant that an image could be both deep ken in its evocation of those norms as well as plain ken in being historically accurate.<sup>123</sup>

## Subjects

### Models and the Imitation of Nature

The uncanny valley theory suggests that viewers have a relatively positive reaction to inhuman and human appearances, but a negative reaction to the “uncanny” appearances of the almost-human. To someone personally familiar with Jesus, the plain-ken illusionism might provoke a negative response, like an uncanny valley. The illusionistic Jesus does not *quite* look like a Jesus.

Many of the plain-ken art techniques were based on the imitation of nature, human or otherwise, a move which—in a wild logical leap—substituted apparent reality for divine reality. Using models at a single time in a single place reduced divine art to a studio exercise.

At the beginning of our period, the visual arts felt a new push to look directly at the mundane world. In his ca. 1400 *Libro dell'arte* [Book of Art], Cennino Cennini (ca. 1370–1440), a student of a student of a student of Giotto, advised that “the most perfect steersman that you can have, and the best helm, lie in the triumphal gateway of copying from nature. And this outdoes all other models.” An artist seeking a “good style” for “natural”-looking mountains should “get some large stones, rugged, and not cleaned up; and copy them from nature, applying the lights and the darks as your system requires.”<sup>124</sup> Note that Cennini

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or Neo-Classic? A Forgery after the Antique Reconsidered,” *The Art Bulletin* 44 (1962): 131–35 dates it over 250 years later.

123 Circle of Andrea Briosci, *Christ Washing the Disciples' Feet* (1520s?), Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, <https://collections.ashmolean.org/object/749380>

124 Cennino d'Andrea Cennini, *The Craftsman's Handbook*, trans. Daniel V. Thompson, Jr., 2 vols. (New York: Dover, 1960), II, 15, 57.

inherited this empirical attitude through the Giotto tradition, although tradition and empiricism were considered alternative routes to such knowledge.

This was part of a general enthusiasm for mirroring the natural world. For the panels of the Baptistery doors, Lorenzo Ghiberti (1378–1455) sought “to imitate nature” and develop the “network of lines [*lineamenti*]” for the perspective effect.<sup>125</sup> This suggests that imitating nature and creating networks of lines were thought of as parallel processes. Brunelleschi’s experiment before the Baptistery, too, modelled nature; his painting included “the Misericordia up to the arch and corner of the sheep [market], and from the side with the column of the miracle of St. Zenobius up to the corner of the straw [market].”<sup>126</sup> Alberti insisted that he based his understanding of painting from the fundamentals of nature, from which the artist must work with “diligence” and “attention and care.” Alberti denounced those painters who, ignoring nature, use their own intelligence to achieve results, for they did “not learn to paint correctly but persist in errors.”<sup>127</sup>

In the fifteenth century, studies from live, male models became normal. A sketch made of live models in preparation for a painting might still have them in contemporary street clothes, leaving the artist to execute the wardrobe change as he did the painting itself. In the next century, artists more frequently took this principled practice to the extreme, often illegal, of using female models for female subjects.<sup>128</sup> Andrea del Verrocchio (ca. 1435–88) made his students draw from nature, sometimes a nature enhanced for visual effect, as when the models were draped with cloth coated with clay to hang heavier.<sup>129</sup> Michelangelo agreed to make a statue of *Christ Carrying the Cross* (1514) “as large as in nature.”<sup>130</sup>

It was one of Verrocchio’s students, Leonardo da Vinci, who was most insistent on preferring nature over a tradition of masters: “The painter’s works will have little merit if he takes for his guide other pictures, but if he will learn from natural things he will bear good fruit...” Indeed, the painter should make his mind like a mirror of nature: “Those who study only the authorities and not the works of nature are in art the grandsons and not the sons of nature, which is the supreme guide of the good authorities.” This attitude against tradition

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125 Lorenzo Ghiberti, *Denkwürdigkeiten (I Commentarii)*, ed. Julius von Schlosser, 2 vols. (Berlin: Bard, 1912), I, 48–49.

126 Antonio di Tuccio Manetti, *The Life of Brunelleschi*, trans. Catherine Enggass (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State UP, 1970), 42–45.

127 Alberti, *On Painting*, 55–56, 62–63, 78.

128 Claire Van Cleave, *Master Drawings of the Italian Renaissance* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2008), 24–25.

129 Serge Bramly, *Leonardo: The Artist and the Man*, trans. Sian Reynolds (London: Penguin, 1992), 78.

130 Gaetano Milanesi, ed., *Le lettere di Michelangelo Buonarroti* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1875), 641.

spilled outside of art, and Leonardo complained that “Whoever in discussion adduces authority uses not intellect but rather memory.”<sup>131</sup>

Leonardo reflected on the history of this shift, starting back in the late thirteenth century. Then, the young shepherd named Giotto drew his goats, “being guided by nature to his art,” and became the first artist to copy nature rather than a tradition of masters. Not satisfied with the mere imitation of his own master, Giotto went beyond “not only the masters of his time but all those of many bygone ages,” an idea that became commonplace, repeated, for example, in Vasari. Giotto’s students, ironically, were so taken with the results of Giotto’s break with tradition that they slavishly imitated the results, creating a new tradition. Only Masaccio found more inspiration in Giotto’s ideas than his images, and “showed by his perfect works how those who take for their standard anyone but nature—the mistress of all masters—weary themselves in vain.”<sup>132</sup> Note that Giotto, Masaccio, and Leonardo himself were all country boys, and grew up in an environment that might have invited more careful observation of nature than a busy, ugly city would have.

How might this have looked in practice? Especially for his *Last Supper*, Leonardo reflected on the kind of person he needed to depict, and then sought out a real-life model with corresponding physical attributes.<sup>133</sup> Leonardo threatened to base his Judas on the prior who commissioned the work, but left Jesus’s head incomplete for want of a natural model; he felt, in Vasari’s words, “incapable of achieving the celestial divinity the image of Christ required.”<sup>134</sup> Vasari and Gian Paolo Lomazzo (1538–92) recalled stories about Leonardo spending a day stalking an interesting-looking person, even into the bathhouse to see his quarry nude, or carefully observing a criminal’s face during torture. One story remembered that Leonardo, keen to depict rural laughter, located

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- 131 Leonardo Da Vinci, *Codex Arundel*, BL Arundel MS 263, 1478–1518, f. 387r; Leonardo da Vinci, *Notebooks*, ed. Irma A. Richter and Thereza Wells, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1952), I, 95; II, 235, 276–77. See Bramly, *Leonardo*, 78, 159; Martin Kemp, *Leonardo da Vinci: The Marvellous Works of Nature and Man* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006), 83–84. At times Leonardo makes things more complicated: he talks of nature being behind the visible world, and of causes being behind nature. Bramly, *Leonardo*, 275; Kemp, *Leonardo da Vinci*, 284; Leonardo Da Vinci, *Codex Arundel*, 398v.
- 132 Leonardo Da Vinci, Milan, Ambrosian Library, *Codex Atlantus*, fol. 387r; Leonardo da Vinci, *Notebooks*, ed. Richter and Wells, 213–14; Vasari, *Lives*, 15–36. See Baxandall, *Painting*, 119–20; Bramly, *Leonardo*, 75–76; Martin Kemp, *Leonardo da Vinci*, 83–84.
- 133 Carlo Amoretti, *Memorie storiche su la vita, gli studj, e le opere di Lionardo da Vinci* (Milan: Giusti, Ferrario, 1804), 62–63; J. P. Richter, ed., *Scritti Letterari di Leonardo da Vinci* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1883), 333–35. On his modelling process in general, see Giambattista Giraldi, *Discorsi* (Venice: Giolito, 1554), 193–94.
- 134 Vasari, *Lives*, 289–91.

the appropriate peasants, set up a feast for them, fed them outrageous humour with the food, and mentally recorded their gestures long enough to retreat home to produce a drawing so true to nature that people who saw it themselves joined the peasants in laughing.<sup>135</sup> Here, Leonardo was not just re-creating a visual scene, but re-creating an emotion. This was plain-ken representation of an emotion—his goal was to recreate specific examples that had happened in spacetime.

Unfortunately, Jesus, like a dragon, was not easily found in nature. Leonardo has an answer for the dragon problem: an artist should combine dragon-like aspects of things found in nature: “take for its head that of a mastiff or setter, for its eyes those of a cat, for its ears those of a porcupine, for its nose that of a greyhound, with the eyebrows of a lion, the temples of an old cock and the neck of a water-tortoise.” In another Vasari story, Leonardo collected small animals to use in modelling the hair of a medusa, and became so intent on his work to be, luckily, oblivious to the stench of the rotting mass of snakes, bats, lizards, and butterflies.<sup>136</sup> There may be good reason why the angel’s wings in Leonardo’s *Annunciation* look like bird’s wings.

At the same time, some observers noted that, in a deep way, each painter’s efforts to imitate nature, or indeed tradition, was mediated by the painter himself. Ridolfo Ghirlandaio (1483–1561) drew on several sources for the faces of the supporting cast in his *Procession to Calvary* (ca. 1505).<sup>137</sup> Vasari commented on the “many very beautiful heads, taken from life and made with love.” One, the man on the far right, might model his father. Two soldiers to the right of the cross appear to be inspired by Leonardo drawings—so not “taken from life,” but taken from an image taken from life.<sup>138</sup>

Some scholars have argued that even if a painting represents a snapshot, the painting itself endures in time. Leonardo meditated on the relationship between painting and music in terms of time and space. Musical sound dies “instantly after its creation.” Painting, in contrast, endures in time, and thus “shows itself to you as something alive while in fact it is confined to a surface.” Thus, a painting, like the person it represents, appears alive because it exists in space.

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135 Gio[vanni] Paolo Lomazzo, *Trattato dell’ arte della pittura, scultura ed architettura*, 3 vols. (Rome: Saverio del-monte, 1844), I, 175–77; *The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci*, trans. Edward MacCurdy, 2 vols. (London: Cape, 1919), II, 512. Martin Clayton, *Leonardo da Vinci: The Divine and the Grotesque* (London: Royal Collection, 2002), 13 casts doubts on the veracity of these traditions.

136 Vasari, *Lives*, 288; da Vinci, *Notebooks*, ed. Richter and Wells, II, 247. See Bramly, *Leonardo*, 98; Clayton, *Leonardo da Vinci*, 157.

137 Ridolfo Ghirlandaio, *The Procession to Calvary* (ca. 1505), National Gallery, London, <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/ridolfo-ghirlandaio-the-procession-to-calvary>

138 Vasari, *Le vite de’ più eccellenti pittori, scultori ed architettori*, 14 vols. (Florence: Le Monnier, 1855), XI, 287.

Strikingly, Leonardo saw the tension not between a painting's representing an instant of time and its existing beyond an instant, but rather between its illusion of liveliness and its two-dimensionality.<sup>139</sup>

The idea that “every painter paints himself,” according to his own conditioning, has been attributed to half a dozen Renaissance figures, suggesting its currency. Leonardo, too, has been accused of reworking the images of his carefully pursued real-life models to make them more like his own face. Dürer noted in 1513 that just as “every mother is well pleased with her own child,” so too “many painters paint figures resembling themselves.” Ultimately, he throws up his hands: “I know not certainly what the ultimate measure of true beauty is.” If their subjects resembled the artists, so too could the artists resemble their subject: in 1500, Dürer executed a self-portrait that bore a striking resemblance to a number of depictions of Jesus (see Chapter 16).<sup>140</sup>

Art historian Noa Turel has noted that description of art as made *au vif* refers to the product not the process, not painted “from life,” but resulting in a painting made “into life.”<sup>141</sup> Renaissance critics applauded the lifelike nature of artists' depictions. Pointing to Giotto's lines' ability to meet nature, the chronicler Filippo Villani (1325–1407) reported that his images “seem to live and exhale breath.”<sup>142</sup> The poet Cristoforo Landino (d. 1498) and Vasari both praised the “vivacity” (*vivacità*, from the Latin *vivo* [to live]) of the sculptures of Donatello.<sup>143</sup> Instantly, the new lifelike images somehow trumped the old living icons, in which, according to the Florentine Giambattista Gelli (1498–1563), portraits with “wide open eyes which appear more like monsters than like people.” Gelli compared Greek icons to “peoples' flayed hides or to pieces of laundry lying on a wall.” Such flaying and flattening has, in fact, its own realism in reducing

139 Emanuel Winternitz, ed., *Leonardo da Vinci as a Musician* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1982), 210–11 (no. 29). See Etienne Souriau, “Time in the Plastic Arts,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 7 (1949): 294–307.

140 Albrecht Dürer, Self-Portrait (1500), Alta Pinakothek, Munich, Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Albrecht\\_Dürer\\_-\\_1500\\_self-portrait\\_\(High\\_resolution\\_and\\_detail\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Albrecht_Dürer_-_1500_self-portrait_(High_resolution_and_detail).jpg). Albrecht Dürer, *The Writings of Albrecht Dürer*, trans. William Martin Conway (New York: Philosophical Library, 1958), 180, 244. See Harry Berger, Jr., *Fictions of the Pose: Rembrandt against the Italian Renaissance* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2000), 79–94; Clayton, *Leonardo da Vinci*, 130.

141 Noa Turel, “Living Pictures: Rereading ‘au vif,’ 1350–1550,” *Gesta* 50 (2011): 163–82, <https://doi.org/10.2307/41550555>; Turel, *Living Pictures*, 22–30.

142 Filippo Villani, *Liber de civitatibus Florentiae famosissimis civibus* (Florence: Mazzoni, 1847), 35.

143 Vasari, *Le vite*, III, 252; Vasari, *Lives*, 152. See Ottavio Morisani, “Art Historians and Art Critics—III: Cristoforo Landino,” *The Burlington Magazine* 95 (1953): 267–70 (269). Note almost identical language in the *Libro* of Antonio Billi: Cornelio de Fabriczy, ed., “Libro di Antonio Billi,” *Archivio storico Italiano* 7 (1891): 299–368 (365).

a three-dimensional being to two dimensions. Gelli favoured proper, plain-ken paintings, which “imitate nature as art should do.”<sup>144</sup>

Such Renaissance critics believed that these images *seemed* to live. The Christian faithful had known that powerful traditional icons *actually* lived—they wept, moved, and worked miracles. In contrast, the Renaissance lost faith in the living icons and thus were able to get excited about pseudo-living images, images that merely *seemed* to live. Although no human can produce a living icon on demand, a skilled human could make a lifelike (not “almost-living”) image. Presumably, the Renaissance artists were taking life as a desideratum, as a mark of power, quality, and authority from icons.

### Image Quotations

Some images appear within another image, like one text “quoting” another. This may allow for an associative deep-ken power, but can also add to the plain-ken illusionism: an image is an unlikely subject for an image, and so an image of an image does not feel like an image. Much depends on the context and the nature of the quoted image: is it merely an image, or it is a powerful visual artifact?<sup>145</sup> The latter may be the case especially in Orthodox icons, which are sometimes nested, like Russian dolls: an image of an image of an image. This occurs sometimes in the Far West as well: fol. 16v of BodL MS Douce 219 presents a Jesus-image (on Veronica’s veil) within an image (a pilgrim badge showing Veronica) within an image (of a badge collection).<sup>146</sup>

The Neri di Bicci workshop in Florence began creating images with embedded images (*Rahmenbilder*). These were often Marian. This might have been a way to adorn older images, and might have been created for liturgical reasons, to replace or echo the actual crucifix physically placed on the altar. In an example in Berlin, the icon even casts a shadow (see Fig. 15.31).<sup>147</sup> Domenico di Zanobi’s (fl. 1476–81) *Coronation of the Virgin* in the San Miniato (1476) is

144 Giovanni Battista Gelli, *Venti vite d’artisti* (Florence: Cellini, 1896), 13–14. On naturalism and idealism see Burke, *Italian Renaissance*, 153–54.

145 From the middle of the fifteenth century representations of miracle-working images became common, and in the hundred years after Trent this interest spiked. David Freedberg, *Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 300–01.

146 BodL MS Douce 219, fol. 16v (main illustrations ca. 1470s, but borders ca. 1480s), <https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/objects/5a7067a1-a61c-4bbc-bca7-f7b0fcee812c/surfaces/a8253922-0bfc-48d5-ae3f-a21af7987aea/>. See Kren and McKendrick, *Illuminating the Renaissance*, 134–37; Fisher, “Flowers and Plants,” 453–64.

147 Isabella Augart, *Rahmenbilder: Konfigurationen der Verehrung im Frühneuzeitlichen Italien* (Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2018).

technically a coronation of the *icon* of the Madonna and Child.<sup>148</sup> Fra Angelico's *San Marco Altarpiece* (ca. 1438–43) has an embedded icon at the base, which could be a reference to predellas or to other parts of the altar.<sup>149</sup>



Fig. 15.31 Neri di Bicci workshop, *Madonna and Child with Saints* (ca. 1470–75), Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Gemäldegalerie, public domain, <https://recherche.smb.museum/detail/863659>

Sometimes, a specific work of art already in existence was quoted in the new piece. The *Spinario* was an ancient sculpture of a seated boy holding and examining his left foot (see Fig. 15.32). It had been recognized as important and, therefore, in a deep-ken way, meaningful, without consensus as to whom it represented. Was this Absalom, the son of King David, who had no blemish even on his foot (2 Sam. 14:25)? Was it Priapus, the Greek fertility god? Was it Jesus, the Good Shepherd? In the Renaissance, plain-ken inspiration prompted a new idea: it did not represent anyone in particular, just a random boy.

148 Domenico di Zanobi, *Coronation of the Virgin* (1476), Museo della Misericordia, San Miniato, Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Domenico\\_di\\_Zanobi\\_\(maestro\\_della\\_natività\\_johnson\),\\_incoronazione\\_della\\_vergine,\\_1480\\_ca,\\_03.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Domenico_di_Zanobi_(maestro_della_natività_johnson),_incoronazione_della_vergine,_1480_ca,_03.JPG)

149 Fra Angelico, *San Marco Altarpiece* (ca. 1438–43), Museo di San Marco, Florence, Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Fra\\_Angelico\\_060.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Fra_Angelico_060.jpg)



Fig. 15.32 The *Spinario* (ca. 323 to 30 BC), Capitolini, Rome, photograph by Sixtus (2006), CC BY-SA 3.0, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lo\\_Spinario.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lo_Spinario.JPG)

Florence, in 1401, saw a competition to execute door panels for the Baptistry, on the theme of the Sacrifice of Isaac, in a style consonant with the current panels from the 1330s. Brunelleschi tied with Ghiberti, but when offered a joint commission, immodestly declined. His contest entry's portrayal of the sacrifice was rich in Old–New Testament consonance: wheat straw represented the Eucharist, and water, baptism—which consonated further with the nature of the Baptistry itself. In the lower right plane, Brunelleschi quoted the *Spinario*: a servant sits in the distinctive pose to remove a thorn, resonating with Jesus the Good Shepherd removing sin.<sup>150</sup>

<sup>150</sup> Benjamin of Tudela, *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela*, trans. Marcus Nathan Adler (London: Oxford UP, 1907), 7; Magister Gregorius, *De Mirabilibus Urbis Romae*, in G. McN. Rushforth, "Magister Gregorius de Mirabilibus Urbis Romae," *Journal of Roman Studies* 9 (1919): 14–58 (49). See Leonard Barkan, *Unearthing the Past: Archaeology and Aesthetics in the Making of Renaissance Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1999), 148–56; Loren W. Partridge, *Art of Renaissance Florence, 1400–1600* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009), 37. Filippo Brunelleschi, *Sacrifice of Isaac* (ca. 1401–02), Musei del Bargello, Florence, Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Brunelleschi%27s\\_Competition\\_Panel.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Brunelleschi%27s_Competition_Panel.jpg)



The *Spinario* continued to appear in Jesus art. Perugino included a *Spinario* in his *Baptism of Christ* (ca. 1482).<sup>151</sup> Here, the figure was removing not a thorn, but his clothes, in preparation for baptism, a rite that would also remove the thorn of sin. That sense of baptismal delivery from sin might also be in play with the *Spinario* figure in Luca Signorelli's (ca. 1441–1523) *Madonna and Child* (1490s), where even without an explicit baptismal context the Baby Jesus would be recognized as a turning point in humanity's relation with sin, and the river in the background might indicate baptism (see Fig. 15.33). Similarly, the ancient Arrotino sculpture of a blade-sharpener appears in Domenico Ghirlandaio's (1448–94) *Baptism* (1480s), again representing someone undressing for baptism.<sup>152</sup>



Fig. 15.33 Luca Signorelli, *Madonna and Child* (1490s), Alte Pinakothek, Munich, CC BY-SA 4.0, <https://www.sammlung.pinakothek.de/en/artwork/2mxqlAd48b>

These examples may have had a historicizing effort in combining classical sculpture with the life of Jesus who lived in classical times. This also speaks to broader contemporary art trends. Around 1500 in Italy, antique-style statues were installed as a reaction against the recent dominance of “modern” painting.<sup>153</sup> Pope Nicholas V (1397–1455) had planned to mount an Egyptian obelisk with a bronze statue of a triumphant Jesus brandishing his cross.<sup>154</sup>

151 Perugino, *Baptism of Christ* (ca. 1482), Sistine Chapel, Rome, Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pietro\\_Perugino\\_-\\_Baptism\\_of\\_Christ\\_-\\_Sistine\\_Chapel\\_-\\_cat13a.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pietro_Perugino_-_Baptism_of_Christ_-_Sistine_Chapel_-_cat13a.jpg)

152 Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Baptism* (1480s), Santa Maria Novella, Florence, [https://www.wga.hu/html\\_m/g/ghirland/domenico/6tornab/62tornab/6baptis.html](https://www.wga.hu/html_m/g/ghirland/domenico/6tornab/62tornab/6baptis.html)

153 Nagel, *Controversy of Renaissance*, 103–02.

154 Giannozzo Manetti, *Vita Nicolai V. Summi Pontificis*, in *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, ed. Lodovico Antonio Muratori, 25 vols. (Milan: Societatis Palatinae in Regia

One ancient statue of Jesus was less ambiguous, as its primary consonance would have been with Jesus itself, and so its quotations would have served plain-ken purposes. The fourth-century historian Eusebius described an ancient Jesus statue, the hem of which inferred miraculous powers on plants that touched it:

[an] image of a man, erect, of the same materials, decently clad in a mantle [*diplois*] and stretching out his hand to the woman. Before her feet and on the same pedestal, there is a certain strange plant growing, which rising as high as the hem of the brazen garment, is a kind of antidote to all kinds of diseases. This statue, they say, is a statue of Jesus Christ, and it has remained even until our times so that we ourselves saw it while tarrying in that city...<sup>155</sup>

This description, and others like it, seems to have inspired the creation of the bronze *Christ the Redeemer* sculpture (ca. 1493, Museo Poldi Pezzoli), although the Eusebius statue is pre-mortem and the bronze one is post-<sup>156</sup> That sculpture, in turn, might be quoted in a number of subsequent works, including Alvise Vivarini's (d. 1503/05) *Risen Christ* (ca. 1497) (see Fig. 15.34), Vittore Carpaccio's (d. ca. 1525) *St. Augustine in His Study* (1502),<sup>157</sup> Giovanni Battista Cima da Conegliano's (d. ca. 1517) *Incredulity of St. Thomas* (1504),<sup>158</sup> and Fra Bartolomeo's (1472–1517) *Salvator Mundi* (1516) altarpiece.<sup>159</sup> Neither Vivarini nor Bartolomeo include the dropped hem, and those quotations might be inexact, or imagined by scholars.

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Curia, 1723–51), III, col. 934–35. See Brian Curran and Anthony Grafton, "A Fifteenth-Century Site Report on the Vatican Obelisk," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 58 (1995): 234–48; Torgil Magnuson, "The Project of Nicholas V for Rebuilding the Borgo Leonino in Rome," *The Art Bulletin* 36 (1954): 89–115; Manfredo Tafuri, *Interpreting the Renaissance: Princes, Cities, Architects*, trans. Daniel Sherer (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2006), 37–41. There is a translation in Christine Smith and Joseph E. O'Connor, *Building the Kingdom: Giannozzo Manetti on the Material and Spiritual Edifice* (Tempe, AZ: ACMRS, 2007), 400–01.

- 155 Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History*, trans. C. F. Cruse (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 253. This may have been an extrapolation from Lk 8:43–4. See Nagel and Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance*, 35–44; Nagel, *Controversy*, 134–40.
- 156 *Resurrected Christ* (1492–93), Poldi Pezzoli Museum, Milan, <https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/christ-the-redeemer/AwFnzLbJkxdJyg>
- 157 Vittore Carpaccio, *St. Augustine in His Study* (1502), Scuola di San Giorgio degli Schiavoni, Venice, Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vittore\\_carpaccio,\\_visione\\_di\\_sant%27agostino\\_01.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vittore_carpaccio,_visione_di_sant%27agostino_01.jpg). See Nagel and Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance*, 35–44.
- 158 Giovanni Battista Cima da Conegliano, *Incredulity of St. Thomas* (1504), National Gallery, London, <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/giovanni-battista-cima-da-conegliano-the-incredulity-of-saint-thomas>
- 159 Fra Bartolomeo, *Salvator Mundi* altarpiece (1516), Palazzo Pitti, Florence, [https://www.wga.hu/html\\_m/b/bartolom/fra/christ4e.html](https://www.wga.hu/html_m/b/bartolom/fra/christ4e.html)



Fig. 15.34 Alvise Vivarini, *Risen Christ* (ca. 1497), San Giovanni, Bragora, photograph by Didier Descouens (2014), Wikimedia, CC BY-SA 3.0, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Alvise\\_Vivarini,\\_Cristo\\_risorto,\\_1497-98.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Alvise_Vivarini,_Cristo_risorto,_1497-98.jpg)

## Artists

### Signatures and Individuality

The closest equivalent to our “art” in medieval Europe is *ars*, which had a wide range of referents, including both skills and information. In this period, “art” arose in tandem with plain-ken approaches. Alberti understood painting less as the product of following one’s teachers—potentially the fruit of a long chain of authorities—and more as an intellectual penetration to the essential—potentially eternal, deep-ken—rules of the art. This parallels the attitude of the Protestant Reformers to tradition.<sup>160</sup> Painters, like musicians, were about replication of a tradition—and the safety and fidelity that implies—rather than original creation or self-expression.<sup>161</sup>

160 Mose Barasch, *Theories of Art*, 3 vols. (Routledge: New York, 2000), I, 45–46, 121–22.

161 Tatiana Vladyshevskaja, “On the Links Between Music and Icon Painting in Medieval Russia,” in *Christianity and the Arts in Russia*, ed. William C. Brumfield and Miloš M. Velimirović (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1991), 14–29 (18).

This is reflected in their signatures, or lack thereof. In contrast, one fourteenth-century manuscript *Speculum Humanae Salvationis* [Mirror of Human Salvation] explicitly omitted the author's name out of humility.<sup>162</sup> Even at the beginning of our period, some Orthodox images had found a way to acknowledge human/secondary authorship without usurping God's prerogative as creator, by preceding the artisan's name with "through the hands of."<sup>163</sup> This was not uncommon globally. In South Asia, images were almost invariably anonymous until the Mughal school produced textual accounts about the paintings and their painters.<sup>164</sup> In Islamic art, humbling qualifiers ("slave", "unaccomplished", "low-born") connote modesty but also suggest (unless forged) an actual signature, given the unlikelihood of attributing authorship and modesty to a third party. An artist's expression of an individual style, or explicit signature, further established an image as an artificial work created at a moment in time, not intended to reflect divine, deep-ken reality.<sup>165</sup>

To be sure, medieval artists sometimes identified themselves in their works.<sup>166</sup> One Russian chalice (gifted in 1449), with St. Veronica, had the inscription "А делал Иван Фомин" [made by Ivan Fomin].<sup>167</sup> In Italy, artists might add a "... me fecit" [... made me] to a crucifix, but this tradition was unexemplified in the north until Jan van Eyck.<sup>168</sup> Antonello da Messina's expressive *Christ Crowned with Thorns*<sup>169</sup> stands behind a parapet on which is illusionistically attached a cartellino reading, *Antonellus de Messina me fecit 1470* (see Fig. 15.35). Vasari relates a story that Michelangelo chiselled his signature (*MICHAELANGELUS BONAROTUS FLORENTINUS FACIEBAT*) into Mary's sash in a fit of pique

162 BnF MS Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, Ms-593 réserve, fol. 1r.

163 Constantine Cavarnos, *Orthodox Iconography* (Belmont, MA: Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, 1977), 65.

164 Som Prakash Verma, "Artists' Signatures in Miniatures of the Mughal School," in Verma, *Interpreting Mughal Painting: Essays on Art, Society, and Culture* (New Delhi: Oxford UP, 2009), 28–43.

165 However, a signature (or artistic self-awareness) does not necessarily imply the artist has special status, or that he was less pious. See Robin Cormack, *Byzantine Art* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), 211; Jeffrey Hamburger, "Seeing and Believing: The Suspicion of Sight and the Authentication of Vision in Late Medieval Art," in *Imagination und Wirklichkeit*, ed. Klaus Krüger and Alessandro Nova (Mainz: von Zabern, 2000), 47–69 (61).

166 Nagel and Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance*, 16.

167 It is in the Sergiev Posad State History and Art Museum-Preserve, Sergiev Posad, and reproduced at *Veronica Route*, <https://veronicaroute.com/1449/10/21/1449-2/> and *The Sergiev-Posad Museum-Preserve*, [http://old.museum-sp.ru/Econst\\_rizn2.html](http://old.museum-sp.ru/Econst_rizn2.html)

168 Joseph Leo Koerner, *Moment of Self-Portraiture in German Renaissance Art* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 106.

169 Antonello da Messina, *Christ Crowned with Thorns* (1470), Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/435580>

upon hearing the *Pietà* misidentified, by visiting Lombards, as the work of “our Gobbo from Milan,” the more famous artist Cristoforo Solari (ca. 1460–1527).<sup>170</sup>



Fig. 15.35 Antonello da Messina, *Christ Crowned with Thorns* (1470), Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, public domain, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/435580>

Throughout the fifteenth century, this sense of the value of the author’s skill became increasingly clear in contracts. At the beginning of the century, a contract was more likely to make specific demands about which expensive materials (gold, ultramarine) must be used; an icon painter who has acquired, perhaps as required by a contract, a rare and costly pigment is not likely to disguise its purity by using advanced mixing techniques for subtle effect. At the end of the century, the same kind of concern was shown towards the skill of the painter, now itself valuable—and a savvy client could value it precisely. In fact, the rise of the artist is only half the story here: taste had cycled into a period where opulence was vulgar, and this was compounded by the relative scarcity of gold throughout the century. In our period, a reversal of social values meant that the artist became more famous than his patron; skill outshone money. Colour purity became a casualty of the plain ken’s “realistic” palette, which came with a greater appreciation of the artist’s skill and innovations of mixing techniques.<sup>171</sup>

<sup>170</sup> Vasari, *Lives*, 425.

<sup>171</sup> Sandra Baragli, *European Art of the Fifteenth Century* (Los Angeles, CA: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2007), 64; Baxandall, *Painting*, 14–15, 23; Kim, Son, and Jeong,

In the late fifteenth century, Jan van Eyck and Rogier van der Weyden were both important enough as artists that copies of their works were made.<sup>172</sup> This began a new trend in recognizing the genius of a great artist. One 1510 guidebook to Florence already points out that an angel in Verrocchio's *Baptism* was done by Leonardo.<sup>173</sup> The painter Sebastiano del Piombo (ca. 1485–1547) praised Michelangelo's *Risen Christ* sculpture by asserting that its knees were worth more than Rome.<sup>174</sup> In fact, the contract for Michelangelo's *Pietà* stipulated that it be "the most beautiful marble work that exists today in Rome, and that no master could do it better."<sup>175</sup>

An Italian memorial to Giotto encapsulates some of these broader trends.<sup>176</sup> In 1490, Benedetto da Maiano's (1442–97) marble relief epitaph was erected in the Florence Cathedral to honour the esteemed artist. It showed Giotto assembling a mosaic representation of Jesus's face, the Mandylyon. The author of the inscription was Angelo Poliziano (1454–94), but he spoke in Giotto's own voice: the text begins, "I am that one through whom painting, extinct, has revived," and concludes, "what was absent in my art was absent in nature." Unexpectedly, this memorial portrays Giotto not as a painter but as a mosaic maker. This was a deliberate move, especially as the depiction of Giotto appears to be based on a painting of Luke *painting* the virgin. Furthermore, the Jesus icon is the least "authored" icon. Ancient mosaics endured the centuries far better than ancient paintings, and so mosaics were associated with antiquity. Many were evacuated into Italy after 1453. Although mostly medieval, they were read as ancient. Lorenzo de' Medici (1449–92), who owned this Jesus mosaic, was keen to restart that lost mosaic tradition.<sup>177</sup>

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"Large-Scale Quantitative Analysis of Painting Arts."

- 172 Hans Memling's *Donne Triptych* (ca. 1478) has a forged Jan van Eyck signature on its reverse, probably an addition of the eighteenth century, when so much was attributed to van Eyck. Hans Memling, *The Donne Triptych*, oil on oak (ca. 1478), National Gallery, London, <http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/hans-memling-the-donne-triptych>; Jenny Graham, *Inventing Van Eyck: The Remaking of an Artist for the Modern Age* (Oxford: Berg, 2007), 40–41.
- 173 Kenneth Clark, *Leonardo Da Vinci: An Account of His Development as an Artist* (London: Penguin, 1971), 24.
- 174 Sebastiano del Piombo to Michelangelo (6 September 1521), in *Il Carteggio di Michelangelo*, ed. Paolo Barocchi and Renzo Ristori, 5 vols. (Florence: Sansoni, 1965–83), II, 313–15. See William E. Wallace, "Michelangelo's *Risen Christ*," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 28 (1997): 1251–80.
- 175 Printed in Kathleen Weil-Garris Brandt, "Michelangelo's *Pietà* for the Capella del Re di Francia," in *Life and Early Works, in Michelangelo, Selected Scholarship in English*, ed. William E. Wallace, 5 vols. (New York: Garland, 1995), I, 245–46.
- 176 Benedetto da Maiano, Giotto bust and epigraph (1490), Florence Cathedral, Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Smf,\\_busto\\_e\\_epigrafe\\_giotto\\_by\\_benedetto\\_da\\_maiano.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Smf,_busto_e_epigrafe_giotto_by_benedetto_da_maiano.JPG)
- 177 Marco Collareta, "Le 'luci della fiorentina gloria,'" *Critica dell'Arte in Toscana* 3 (1991): 136–43; Nagel and Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance*, 123–34; Alexander

## Opposition to Illusionism

Art historians have long appreciated how what we here call plain-ken art implies a spatial and plain-ken logic. Philosopher Etienne Souriau explained that “Every work of art creates its own universe. And whoever speaks of a universe speaks of a whole built upon a space-time net-work.”<sup>178</sup> Scholars have been quick to characterize that logic, rhetorically but revealingly, as reality. This understanding applies both to the theory of plain-ken art (rational space as “objective reality”) or to its products (Bellini’s depictions of events happening in a “well ordered reality”).<sup>179</sup>

Over the last century, historians have come to appreciate that perspective is not an absolute, universal truth, but a particularist convention linked to a set of conventions. In 1927, Erwin Panofsky wrote of “perspective as symbolic form.” Michael Baxandall notices that Renaissance painting has more straight lines and right angles than seem to exist in nature. Ernest Gilman links the reality most inextricably to illusion:

The more perfect the representation of reality achieved in a perspective picture, the more perfect is the deception practiced on the viewer. Alberti’s window opens onto an *illusion of reality*; these two irreconcilable categories are joined in the perspective painting, which thus takes on an intriguing and complex dimension not found in conceptual art.<sup>180</sup>

Inversely, Oskar Wulff and, after him, Pavel Florensky recovered the value of the pre-Renaissance “anti-perspective” and “reverse-perspective.”<sup>181</sup>

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Nagel, “Authorship and Image-Making in the Monument to Giotto in Florence Cathedral,” *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 53/54 (2008): 143–51, <https://doi.org/10.1086/RESvn1ms25608814>. Rembrandt Duits, “Byzantine Icons in the Medici Collection,” in *Byzantine Art and Renaissance Europe*, ed. Angeliki Lymberopoulou and Rembrandt Duits (London: Routledge, 2013), 157–84, is dubious of Nagel’s claims.

178 Etienne Souriau, “Time in the Plastic Arts,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 7 (1949): 294–307 (294).

179 Bernhard Degenhart and Annegrit Schmitt, *Jacopo Bellini: The Louvre Album of Drawings*, trans. Frank Mecklenburg (New York: George Braziller, 1984), 14; Joost-Gaugier, “Jacopo Bellini’s Interest,” 23.

180 Ernest B. Gilman, *The Curious Perspective* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1978), 31.

181 Hans Belting, *Florence and Baghdad: Renaissance Art and Arab Science* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2011), 18, reasonably asks, “How could something be reversed if it hadn’t been invented yet?” I see no problem with calling the thirteenth century a microwave-oven-free zone, and would consider it a positive good if there were widespread assumptions that microwave ovens always existed.

This, however, is a late development, an eleventh-hour recovery of lost knowledge. At the time, wise observers knew this, too. Even before the Renaissance doubled down on illusion, medieval skeptics recognized the power of images to deceive, and the necessity of discernment to sort out visions, dreams, and hallucinations. Already with the popularity of the theories of Alhazen (d. ca. 1040) and Vitello (ca. 1230–80/1314) there arose an awareness that perception could deceive depending on the viewer's position.



Fig. 15.36 Domenico Veneziano, *Madonna and Child with Saints* (ca. 1445), Uffizi Gallery, Florence, Wikimedia, public domain, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Domenico\\_Veneziano\\_-\\_The\\_Madonna\\_and\\_Child\\_with\\_Saints\\_-\\_WGA06428.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Domenico_Veneziano_-_The_Madonna_and_Child_with_Saints_-_WGA06428.jpg)

Brunelleschi was fascinated by creating illusionistic images, but we should not take him as typical. Linear perspective never totally dominated, because there was always skepticism about illusionism in general, as well as doubt about this or that particular illusion. More purely artistic concerns about compositional balance meant that the laws of perspective were taken as suggestions, more often adapted than adopted rigorously, and perhaps sometimes (especially in the early years) artists simply felt working out a unified perspective was not a good use of their time. Domenico Veneziano's (ca. 1410–61) *Madonna and Child with Saints* (ca. 1445) (see Fig. 15.36) deviates from the Albertan system by moving the vanish point from the line connecting the saints' heads to Mary's groin, contracting the architectural framing around the human figures. Mantegna's *Presentation* abandoned a single vanishing point in order to create a



composition according to “divine” geometry: the angle between Mary’s forearm and the bottom of the composition measures a line on the right vertical edge half the length of the bottom edge.<sup>182</sup>

Some painters resisted, in a somewhat Chinese way, the bargain of linear perspective (which the Chinese considered a rip-off), because of its main collateral cost, the requirement of a single viewing point. This requirement created two interrelated collateral mathematical problems: (1) How to find the eye point if you know what the image should look like? (2) How to find what the image should look like if you know the eye point? If you know neither where the artist intended your eye to be nor what the artist intended your eye to see, you have no recourse beyond just experimenting until it “looks right.” Artists like Leonardo worried about the probability that their works would usually be seen by observers not perfectly stationed, who would then see only a distortion. Their solution was the inconsistent use of perspective rules, by which the image would look perfect for no viewer standing anywhere. There lingered a sense that the illusionistic images were less real. Donatello complained that the obsessive, mathematical precision of Paolo Uccello’s (1397–1475) drawings, like this chalice (see Fig. 15.37), made him “abandon the certain for the uncertain.”<sup>183</sup> Symeon of Thessalonica (d. 1429) opposed Western innovations and attempts at verisimilitude: “instead of painted garments and hair, they adorn them with human hair and clothes, which is not the image of hair and of a garment, but the hair and garment of a man, and hence is not an image and a symbol (typos) of the prototype.”<sup>184</sup> German satirists mocked painters for modelling saints on family members or on sex workers.<sup>185</sup>

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182 Andrea Mantegna, *Presentation in the Temple* (ca. 1455), Gemäldegalerie, Berlin, <https://recherche.smb.museum/detail/863431/die-darbringung-christi-im-tempel>. See Brigit Blass-Simmen, “One Cartoon—Two Paintings,” in *Bellini/Mantegna*, ed. Blass-Simmen, Villa, and Rowley, 35–49 (42–43); Martin Kemp, *The Science of Art: Optical Themes in Western Art from Brunelleschi to Seurat* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1990), 9–52; John White, *The Birth and Rebirth of Pictorial Space* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), 113–21.

183 Vasari, *Lives*, 75; Vasari, *Le vite*, III, 89. See Richard Talbot, “Design and Perspective Construction: Why Is the Chalice the Shape It Is?,” in *Nexus VI: Architecture and Mathematics*, ed. Sylvie Duvernoy and Orietta Pedemonte (Turin: Kim Williams, 2006), 121–34.

184 Symeon of Thessalonica, *Contra haereses*, ch. 23, in *The Art of the Byzantine Empire, 312–1453*, ed. Cyril A. Magno (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), 253–54.

185 Thomas Murner, *Die Narrenbeschwörung*, ed. Karl Goedete (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1879), 212; Johannes Geiler von Kaysersberg, *Das Evangelibuch* (Strassburg: Grieninger, 1515), fol. 210r.

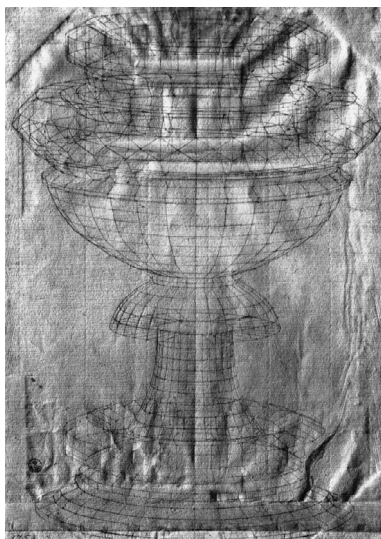


Fig. 15.37 Paolo Uccello, *Perspective Study of a Chalice* (ca. 1430), Uffizi Gallery, Florence, Wikimedia, public domain, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Paolo\\_uccello,\\_perspective\\_study.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Paolo_uccello,_perspective_study.jpg)

Some owners opposed illusionism by removing background details, which might have also undermined the artist's authority. One such owner took appropriately illustrated woodcuts and pasted them into a meditation on the life of Jesus; each woodcut's bottom edge was affixed to the top of the page, so that it would have to be flipped up to be seen (and to avoid covering the text).<sup>186</sup> The Augustinian nun Anna Ebin (d. 1485) took a woodcut of the Crucifixion, removed Mary and John—leaving only two of his toes behind—and pasted it into the manuscript she had written about St. Lidwina. She located it as an illustration of the saint's vision of the crucified Baby Jesus, and was apparently not phased by the discrepancy with the age of woodcut's crucified adult Jesus.<sup>187</sup> In Nuremberg, Hartmann Schedel (1440–1514) put Jesus engravings into secular books: *A Noli me tangere* and an *Agony in the Garden* illustrated a horticultural anthology, and a *Jesus Teaching the Doctors* a grammar manual.<sup>188</sup> Schedel's placements served as a kind of reverse secularization, not putting the everyday into Jesus images, but putting Jesus images into the everyday. Perhaps the most complex manipulations were done by the Italian lawyer Jacopo Rubieri

<sup>186</sup> Areford, *Viewer and Printed Image*, 85–87.

<sup>187</sup> Reproduced in *ibid.*, 73.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 10–19; Hernad, *Graphiksammlung*, 72.

(1430–after 1500). He blacked out the landscape of a stigmatization. He took a woodcut of saints with a Crucifixion and pasted over it a cut-out Crucifixion, and over *that* a woodcut of Augustine. He pasted a *Last Supper* woodcut to serve as a frontispiece to a text of dry legal protocols, perhaps using the former to admonish the latter. In one *Last Judgment* woodcut, Rubieri removed (blacked out) Mary, John the Baptist, and two angels, perhaps to focus the viewer's attention more narrowly on Jesus.<sup>189</sup>

There was even pushback against the idea of artist as genius. In Nicholas of Cusa's (1401–64) *Idiota de mente* [The Layman on Mind] (ca. 1450), a spoon-maker named Idiota distinguishes his craft from the poets' and the painters': they merely imitate nature, while he, like God, creates something new. This self-consciousness about the human ability to create has been linked to the rise of modernity, although (for reasons not well understood) historically the painters and poets pushed aside the spoon-makers to claim that *they themselves* were the true creators.<sup>190</sup>

Another set of objections to plain-ken art criticized not the illusionism, but the naturalistic immodesty. Desiderius Erasmus (1466–1536) objected to “stupid and impious” details in depictions of Jesus in Mary and Martha's house.<sup>191</sup> Domenico Ghirlandaio painted a *Last Supper* fresco (1480, Cenacolo di Ognissanti, Florence), in which Peter points to Jesus with his thumb; later artists would avoid such vulgar gestures.<sup>192</sup> The opposition was deep ken. Drawing from antiquity, Lorenzo Valla (1407–57) explained decor as “a kind of beauty or *pulchritudo* derived from the suitability [*decentia*] of things and persons to both place and time, whether in action or speech. It also applies to virtues, when it is called *decorum*: this refers not so much to virtue itself as to what common opinion considers to be virtuous, beautiful, and fitting...”<sup>193</sup>

The period's most famous voice warning against the incautious use of art was Savonarola's. His reforms dampened the art world. Savonarola's criteria for religious images differed by location: in churches, paintings should be awesome, while in the private home they should be simple, lest they distract. In the latter case, he urged a very personal engagement: One viewing a crucifix

189 All reproduced in Areford, *Viewer and Printed Image*, 123, 125, 132, 136–37, 141–42.

190 Nicholas of Cusa, *Idiota de mente* (*The Layman on Mind*), in *Nicholas of Cusa on Wisdom and Knowledge*, trans. Jasper Hopkins (Minneapolis, MN: Banning, 1996).

191 Erasmus, “*Instituio christiani matrimonii*,” trans. Michael J. Heath, in *Spiritualia and Pastoralia*, ed. John W. O'Malley and Louis A. Perraud, CWE 69, 385.

192 Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Last Supper* (1480), Cenacolo di Ognissanti, Florence. See Heinrich Wölfflin, *Die klassische Kunst: eine Einführung in die italienische Renaissance* (Munich: F. Bruckmann, 1914), 198.

193 Quoted in Baxandall, *Painting*, 10.

should realize that “God is dead, crucified by me.”<sup>194</sup> He opposed the sacrifice of spiritual power for visual, secular illusionism. Botticelli’s paintings, as we have seen, may well have been affected by Savonarola’s sermons. Commissions declined in 1494, and took almost a decade after his death to recover, a recovery performed by artists like Leonardo and Michelangelo.<sup>195</sup>

## Envoi

The motivations for this shift to plain-ken realism are not clear, but we might think about it in terms of its implications.<sup>196</sup> The artist became more socially important, and individually self-important, which suggests the rising spiritual importance given to the self. The pleasure that artists and patrons took in art suggests a move away from asceticism, and the deep-ken power of art.

Perhaps the early goal was not the realistic depiction of reality, but the realistic depiction of staged miracle plays (see Chapter 19). These changes in painting influenced and were influenced by the development of illusionistic details on the stage. In the sacred dramas, a choric *festaiuolo* (typically an angel) stood on stage to connect the audience with what was happening on stage. Some paintings have a similar figure, sometimes an angel, performing a similar role: in Piero della Francesca’s *Baptism of Christ*, for example, one angel looks at us while the angel whose shoulder he palms looks at Jesus.<sup>197</sup> In one Nativity play, the shepherds take time to eat a snack on stage, which magnifies not the glory of God but the apparent reality of the shepherds.<sup>198</sup> The fifteenth-century Bishop Abraham of Suzdal, in Florence for the 1439 Council, was impressed by the sacred drama’s technologies, from suspended actors to artificial lights. He noted the similarities between these dramas and paintings, in such details as Jesus’s disciples lack of shoes in either medium.<sup>199</sup> Certainly, perspective

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194 Quoted in Gustave Gruyer, *Les illustrations des écrits de Jérôme Savonarole, publiés en Italie au XVe et au XVIe siècle* (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1879), 204.

195 M. B. Hall, “Savonarola’s Preaching and the Patronage of Art,” in *Christianity and the Renaissance*, ed. Timothy Verdon and John Henderson (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse UP, 1990), 505, 512–13.

196 Perhaps the most sympathetic of scholarly arguments is Lloyd Benjamin’s, that the realism was devotional. Lloyd Benjamin “Disguised Symbolism Exposed and the History of Early Netherlandish Painting,” *Studies in Iconography* 2 (1976): 11–24.

197 Piero della Francesca, *Baptism of Christ* (1440s), National Gallery, London, Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Piero\\_della\\_Francesca\\_-\\_Baptism\\_of\\_Christ\\_-\\_WGA17595.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Piero_della_Francesca_-_Baptism_of_Christ_-_WGA17595.jpg). See Baxandall, *Painting*, 72, 75–76; Edgerton, *Mirror*, 18–19; Edgerton, *Renaissance*, 24–25.

198 Alessandro D’Ancona, ed., *Sacre rappresentazioni dei secoli XIV, XV, e XVI*, 3 vols. (Florence: Le Monnier, 1872), I, 197.

199 Alexander Wesselovsky, “Italienische Mysterien in einem russischen Reisebericht des XV Jahrhunderts,” *Russische Revue* 10 (1877): 425–41.

techniques had entered the theatre: to demonstrate the perspective technique, Brunelleschi, in 1422, produced in Santa Maria del Carmine in Florence a live-action re-enactment of the Ascension. Careful positioning and use of a pulley harness attached to “Jesus” created an illusion of his ascending up to waiting angels in a “seventh heaven” on a raised stage.<sup>200</sup> Maybe it was an attempt to bring the divine into our secular life. Maybe it reflected flat glass mirrors, only recently available.<sup>201</sup>

When these plain-ken techniques finally developed in the Italian Renaissance, they enjoyed a popularity and authority lasting until the arrival of modern art. This may be a sign of Europe becoming increasingly provincial. It may also be linked to the rise of the plain ken in music, history, and other facets of culture. We can also see that provincial plain-ken inclinations spread beyond Europe. In this period, painters in the Orthodox world were making representations of the Mandylyon appear more illusionistic.<sup>202</sup> In Ethiopia, the Kidana Mehrat cave church, on Debre Tsion near Degum, had illusionistic mid-fifteenth-century frescoes: one bay’s “dome”—if that’s the right word for the ceiling of a carved cave—had a complex ribboned cross and four pendentives to make it look like an actual dome, even when they were not necessary and had no base to rest upon.<sup>203</sup>

The Renaissance shift from the deep to the plain ken resembles more recent shifts with photography and computer-generated images (CGI). One study discovered that soft shadows and surface textures are key in making CGI look photographic (“real”). A turning point came in achieving photorealism when the 1995 movie *Toy Story* roughed up surfaces.<sup>204</sup> Another study found that an eye-level perspective made scenes appear more “realistic.”<sup>205</sup> Even the word

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200 Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, B. R. 228, fol. 115rv.

201 Edgerton, *Renaissance*, 145; Götz Pochat, *Theater und bildende Kunst im Mittelalter und in der Renaissance in Italien* (Graz: Akademische Druck- u. Verlagsanstalt, 1990), 87–92.

202 Alexei Lidov, “The Miracle of Reproduction: The Mandylyon and Keramion as a Paradigm of the Sacred Space,” in *L’immagine di Cristo dall’acheropita alla mano d’artista*, ed. Christoph L. Frommel and Gerhard Wolf (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 2006), 32–33; Giovanni Morello and Gerhard Wolf, *Il Volto di Cristo* (Milan: Electa, 2000), 93–94.

203 María José Friedlander, *Ethiopia’s Hidden Treasures* (Addis Ababa: Shama, 2007), 90.

204 Paul Rademacher, Jed Lengyel, Edward Cutrell, and Turner Whitted, “Measuring the Perception of Visual Realism in Images,” in *Rendering Techniques*, ed. S. J. Gortler and K. Myszkowski (Vienna: Springer, 2001), 235–47.

205 Cathy Ennis, Christopher Peters, and Carol O’Sullivan, “Perceptual Effects of Scene Context and Viewpoint for Virtual Pedestrian Crowds,” *ACM Transactions on Applied Perception* 8 (2011): 1–22, <https://doi.org/10.1145/1870076.1870078>; Shaojing Fan, Tian-Tsong Ng, Jonathan S. Herberg, Bryan L. Koenig, Cheston Y. -C. Tan, and Rangding Wang, “An Automated Estimator of Image Visual Realism Based on Human Cognition,” in *2014 IEEE Conference on Computer Vision and*

“animation” literally means to provide with a soul, resonating with discussions of lifelike Renaissance art.

Beyond the strictly visual, the general atmosphere of the last two decades’ highbrow film and television has developed in ways that answer and reward plain-ken expectations. Some naturalistic filmmakers today tend to include “realistic” levels of darkness and background noise, even if it makes action hard to see, and dialogue hard to understand—possibly to the detriment of any deep-ken message. Plain-ken preference for ugliness and limitations parallel the gritty realism of Prestige TV. Critics’ and audiences’ fascination with the “deeply human” antiheroes of *Breaking Bad* echoes Bartolomeo Facio’s praise of the portrait “lacking only a voice” to be alive.<sup>206</sup> The spotlight on change and character development have dethroned the episodic series that reset to a deep-ken stability at the end of every episode.

Over time, linear perspective spread through space and anchored itself more deeply into assumptions about reality, making those assumptions appear objective and absolute. Its development was mirrored in contemporary philosophy, as in the works of Nicholas of Cusa, a correspondent of Alberti (see Chapter 13). There was an initial hesitation in taking it up, and it is not significantly used in scientific or architectural drawings until Leonardo da Vinci. In the sixteenth century, this idea of the superiority of linear perspective spread to France, the Low Countries, and the German-speaking lands, although Dürer still had to go to Bologna to learn the “secret” of perspective. By 1600, it had become a standard tool. Galileo’s collaborator Guidobaldo del Monte (1545–1607), in his 1600 *Perspectivae libri sex* [Six Books on Perspective], did the math to “prove” the convergence rule. By 1700, it had become absolute truth in the Far West, at least among the artistic elite. The use of mathematics reassured theorists that they had found a way to mirror the reality of the world, in a way that reflected the physiological reality of the act of seeing.<sup>207</sup> Just as the deep ken drew from number theory, the plain ken took and gave authority to its own geometry.

The plain ken’s assumptions came with a price. Forced to view the subject at a single time, at a single place, we lose the angle of totality. Alberti compares the viewer’s perspective to a single glance through an “open window.”<sup>208</sup> The Chinese felt the high price made this a foolish bargain; the Italians thought it was

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*Pattern Recognition*, ed. CPVR (Los Alamitos: IEEE Computer Society, 2014), 4201–08, <https://doi.org/10.1109/CVPR.2014.535>

206 Baxandall, “Bartholomaeus,” 103.

207 Clark, *Vanities*, 84–85; Edgerton, *Renaissance*, 24; Edgerton, *Mirror*, 6.

208 Alberti, *On Painting*, 39.

worth it.<sup>209</sup> The appearance of engagement has been sacrificed for an appearance of distance. An emphasis on individual components, and the relationships among them, has been sacrificed for an emphasis on the less real spatial relationship they might happen to find themselves in.<sup>210</sup> Four centuries before Alberti wrote of visual rays that “surround the whole surface itself like a cage,”<sup>211</sup> the Chinese theorist Su Shi praised a painter who “has soared above the images” like “an immortal crane released from the cage.”<sup>212</sup> The Far West artists came to value cages, and art historians reinforce the cage walls when they describe illusionistic spaces as “plausible” or “believable.” The cage may make us feel secure, but it also traps us in a set of limitations.<sup>213</sup>

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209 Peter Burke, Luke Clossey, and Felipe Fernández-Armesto, “The Global Renaissance,” *Journal of World History* 28 (2017): 8–10, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jwh.2017.0000>

210 Edgerton, *Renaissance*, 20–21.

211 Alberti, *On Painting*, 28.

212 “摩詰得之於象外，有如仙翮謝籠樊。” Bush, *Literati*, 29, 188 (her translation).

213 For example, Dawson W. Carr, *Andrea Mantegna: The Adoration of the Magi* (Los Angeles, CA: Ghetty, 1997), 16, 19, 28, 39.

# 16. Extraordinary Jesus Images

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## Jesus in the History of Art

Before turning to specific examples, we can make some observations about the history of Jesus images simply by looking at large quantities of metadata, the kind of information found not in the image, but on the museum placard next to it—the creator, its date and place, its subject. In the course of this research, for the 1380–1820 Late Traditional period our research team collected 10,059 Jesus images, further supplemented with an additional 1,570 Jesus images from the online Web Gallery of Art. The analysis of this big dataset allows us to make observations that before computers would only have been felt and hypothesized by the most knowledgeable of art historians.<sup>1</sup>

Some statistical-data collection has already been performed for art history more generally, especially looking at colour. Orthodox icons prefer warm colours, with a strong preference for orange over blue. This is similar to the palette of modern art, only more extreme in its preferences. Renaissance art is less distinctive in terms of hues.<sup>2</sup> Such scholarship is necessarily tentative: colours can be especially susceptible to time. Venetian greens have turned black. Although manuscripts have a better survival rate, most of the tens of thousands of medieval canvas paintings have been lost; most medieval colour has been lost.<sup>3</sup> Still, scholars have reached some conclusions. Analysis of it shows, for example, that pre-Renaissance paintings (and Jackson Pollock!) used fewer, purer colours.<sup>4</sup> Mary's blue robe was a blue

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1 See Global Jesus, *SFU Digitized Collections*, <https://digital.lib.sfu.ca/global-jesus>

2 Krassimira Ivanova, Peter Stanchev, Koen Vanhoof, Milena Dobрева, "APICAS-Content-Based Image Retrieval in Art Image Collections Utilizing Colour Semantics," in *Access to Digital Cultural Heritage*, ed. Krassimira Ivanova, Milena Dobрева, Peter Stanchev, and George Totkov (Plovdiv: Plovdiv UP, 2008), 192–94. I base my conclusions on their data, but they did not come to the same conclusions.

3 Phoebe Stubbs, ed., *Colour in the Making: From Old Wisdom to New Brilliance* (London: Black Dog, 2013), 44–46.



robe, partaking in something like a Platonic ideal of blueness. It showed its truth and beauty through its purity. Renaissance artists, in contrast, mixed their colours, giving a greater variety and potential for nuance that allowed illusionistic representation of the observed world. The Renaissance also saw a diversification of genres, with landscapes and secular portraits becoming as mainstream as religious icons.

No major trends in painting match the same high saturation of colours that we see in icons. Again, modern art will come close, although without reaching the same levels. So, part of plain-ken illusionism is a decrease in saturation—a greying—the reds are less red, the blues less blue. Romantic art takes this further, with an especially low level of saturation, although the Romantic lows are less extreme than the iconic highs.<sup>5</sup>

The place of Renaissance art in the history of colour is extraordinary. In some ways it is boring—in terms of hue, luminance, saturation, it hugs the average. But this also means that it is foundational—and we see the importance of the Renaissance, too, when we look at the peculiarities of the icons. In fact, it may be wiser to think about the icons not as highly saturated warmly hued outliers but as the Renaissance as this strangely low-saturated cool-hued innovation—that looks less extraordinary to us because what followed it chronologically followed (copied) it artistically. The average was achieved early.

This mosaic summarizes the subjects of 8400 Jesus images created during the Late Traditional period (see Fig. 16.1). The size of each tile corresponds to that composition type's frequency. "Madonna and Child," the giant cornflower-blue tile at centre right, is the largest. In contrast, notice the pale-green "Teaching Ministry," at the lower right, which amounts to only 6% of the total. This is the category that contains all the images of Jesus's life between his childhood and the week before his death, essentially his entire teaching career. All his miracles, all his ethical teachings—which include parables that would lend themselves well to visual representation—are thus hugely underrepresented. Birth and death dominate.

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4 Daniel Kim, Seung-Woo Son, and Hawoong Jeong, "Large-Scale Quantitative Analysis of Painting Arts," *Scientific Reports* 4, 7370 (2014): n.p., <https://doi.org/10.1038/srep07370>

5 Ivanova et al., "APICAS-Content-Based Image Retrieval," 193. Films also use muted colours to present themselves as more realistic.

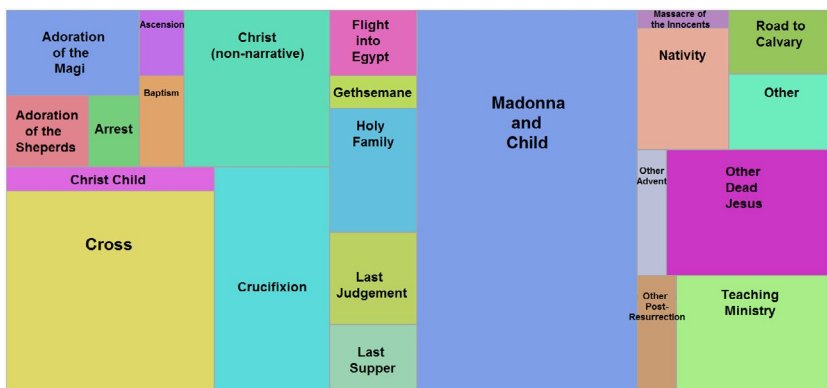


Fig. 16.1 Data Mosaic. Created by Luke Clossey (2023), CC BY-NC-ND.

However, this changes across space. This chart visualizes the correspondence between the Jesus images’ subjects and the regions in which they were created (see Fig. 16.2). The Baptism and the many Madonnas with Child are distinctively Italian. A number of key composition types are “shared” between two places, popular in both: the cross for Russia and Britain, the Nativity for Britain and Iberia, the Crucifixion for Central Europe and France, and the Flight into Egypt for France and the Low Countries. The Last Supper belongs to three regions, Italy, Britain, and Iberia. Non-narrative representations of Jesus, as well as of the cross and the Trinity, are further east, in Russia and Central Europe. Last Judgment imagery is so extremely Dutch, and so rare in Italy and Russia, that it falls off the right edge of the diagram.<sup>6</sup>

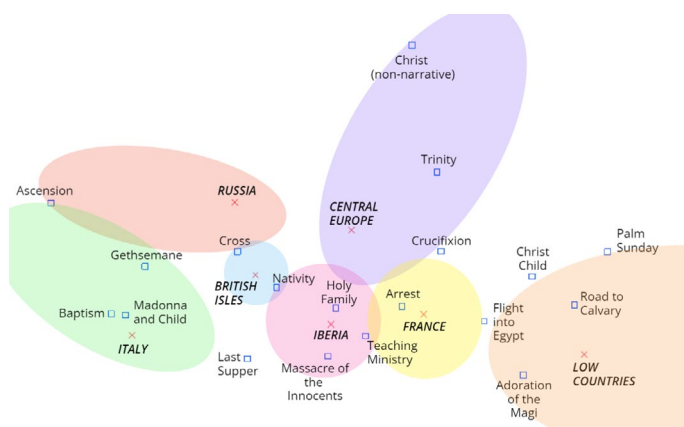


Fig. 16.2 Correspondence Analysis over Space. Created by Luke Clossey (2023), CC BY-NC-ND.

6 The pastel bubbles here merely suggest patterns; only each region’s red “x” has precise statistical significance.

Looking across all three periods' Jesus art, we can similarly use correspondence analysis to explore the relationship between chronology and iconography (see Fig. 16.3). Subjects on this chart are close together if they are popular at the same time. Let us begin with the 1380–1530 bubble. Here, three composition-types associated with Jesus's birth—the Nativity, the Madonna and Child, the Adoration of the Magi—are most distinctive; within the bubble, these three are farthest from the other two periods. Two central subjects from Jesus's Passion—the Last Supper and the Crucifixion—are also disproportionately represented here.

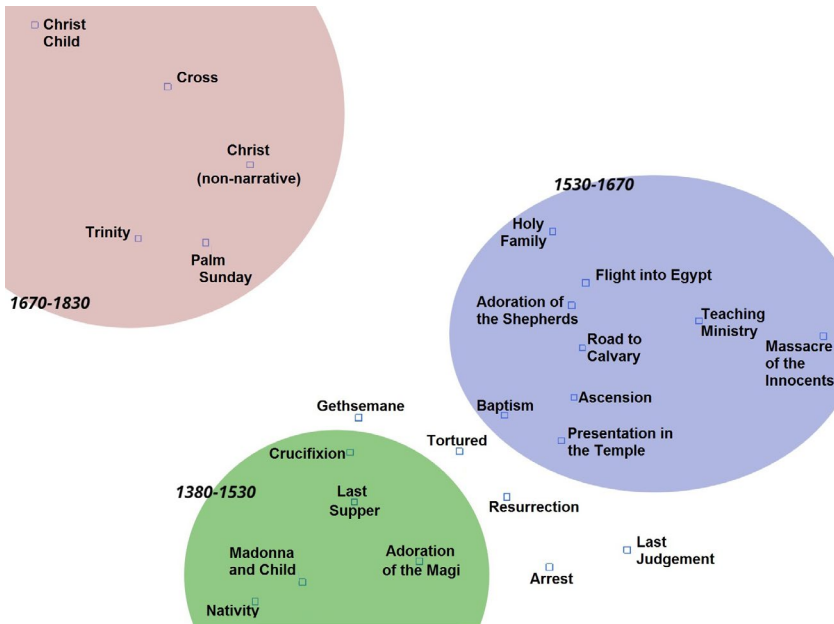


Fig. 16.3 Correspondence Analysis over Time. Created by Luke Clossey (2023), CC BY-NC-ND.

Passing through narrative subjects shared equally by the first and second periods—the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus's Arrest and Torture, and then his Resurrection and return for the Last Judgment—we reach the 1530–1670 bubble. Here we find what we might today consider secondary subjects: instead of the Nativity, the Flight into Egypt; instead of the Adoration of the Magi and its opportunity for conspicuous displays of kingly wealth, the Adoration of the Shepherds; instead of the climactic Crucifixion, we have Jesus carrying the cross on the Road to Calvary. Perhaps the prominence of the central subjects in the earlier period, and their continued display into this period, encouraged artists and patrons to turn to more minor moments. Most distinctive here—furthest

from the other periods' bubbles—are the teaching-ministry category and the Massacre of the Innocents. Perhaps this reflects the Reformation in, respectively, a heightened attention to doctrine and the carnage of the wars of religion. Certainly this period's anti-Marian impulses in Protestant areas confine the Madonna and Child to the earlier period's bubble.

Excepting Palm Sunday, the third bubble, for the 1670–1830 period, steps away from narrative events in Jesus's life. Instead, we find Jesus presented outside of time, the Christ Child and the cross both abstracted from the historical moments of Nativity and Crucifixion, and the Trinity typically portrayed in a heavenly setting—perhaps a rebellion against the overall contours of the shift from deep to plain ken in art. This period's imagery is also less dark and dreadful: the two composition types furthest from its bubble are the Last Judgment and the Massacre of the Innocents.

Within this wealth of images, some welcome particular consideration, either for themselves or for the circumstances of their creation. This chapter looks at Jesus images that are special in some way—lively (in a miraculous way), made from life (in an authentic way), or lifelike (and often bleeding life)—or all three at once.

## Miraculous Jesus images

The most powerful index of an image's truth is its own power. Real images can do impressive things. They can be invulnerable to damage; they can speak, cry, and move their eyes. They can be used for idolatry, or to discourage sin. Their exchange can meaningfully seal treaties. Miraculous images can transmit their power. They can copy themselves, and the copies themselves can be miraculous. Around 1400, one image was empowered by working into its back side some fragments of an earlier image, which was known to have been made from the wood of the Holy Cross. A miraculous Renaissance icon tends to do a miracle somewhere unexpected and inappropriate, and so it is believed by one person, and disbelieved by most. Often the Church steps in to claim it from an individual using it for his or her own purposes, to re-purpose it for public worship, which could be lucrative. There are thousands of testimonials attesting to the power, and truth, of the images at the heart of Jesus cult centres.<sup>7</sup>

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7 Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 308, 333, 436–41; Rolf Fritz, "Das Halbfigurenbild in der westdeutschen Tafelmalerei um 1400," *Zeitschrift für Kunstwissenschaft* 5 (1951): 161–78 (161); Matthew John Milliner, "The Virgin of the Passion: Development, Dissemination, and Afterlife of a Byzantine Icon Type" (PhD thesis, Princeton University, 2011), 101; Richard Trexler, "Being and

An anonymous monk-painter in France, not later than 1472, painting a Last Judgment high up on the side of a church, depicted the devil as so visibly evil—his skill was such that he could do this well—that the devil, furious, knocked him off the scaffolding. Just in time, a Madonna and Child that he had painted below stretched out her arm and, with assistance from Baby Jesus, caught him (see Fig. 16.4). She returned her arm to its usual position once he was safe, once others had arrived to witness the miracle.<sup>8</sup> In a similar example, a murderer was about to be executed in Rome, but his mother kidnapped a Baby Jesus from a Mary sculpture, and successfully extorted Mary to rescue her son—a son-for-a-son consonance.<sup>9</sup>



Fig. 16.4 Jean le Tavernier, *Miracle of the Caught Preacher* (ca. 1450s), *Miracles de Notre Dame*, Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Douce 374, fol. 93r, <https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/objects/89523ebe-296d-49fe-b5a9-77671c8383da/surfaces/b448371d-ca13-4acd-90c6-692fd9dcd0fa/>

The mystic Lucy Brocadelli (1476–1544) had several interactions with miraculous images. As a child, she was offered an array of toys, and she picked out a rosary with a Christ Child image, which she called Christarello. Whenever she was reprimanded, the Christarello would wipe the tears from her face. In another incident, at church she saw a marble Mary-and-Christ-Child statue.

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Non-Being: Parameters of the Miraculous in the Traditional Religious Image,” in *The Miraculous Image in the Late Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. Erik Thune and Gerhard Wolf (Rome: Erma di Bretschneider, 2004), 15–28.

- 8 Variations of this story appear in *Vie et miracles de Notre Dame*, BnF MS Fr. 9199, fol. 96v–99v and *Cantigas de Santa María*, San Lorenzo de El Escorial, Real Biblioteca del Monasterio, MS T-I-1, fol. 108v–09r. See also David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 307 (who explicitly states that the Christ Child assisted); George F. Warner, ed., *Miracles de Notre Dame collected by Jean Mielot* (Westminster: Nichols, 1885), xxxiv–xxxv.
- 9 *Miracles de Notre Dame*, ed. Jean Mielot (1456), BodL MS Douce 374, fol. 90r–92v. Illustrations by Jean le Tavernier.

At Brocadelli's request, Mary gave her the Christ Child, which became a living baby. Brocadelli took the baby home, dodging confused adults trying to take him from her, and barricaded herself and Jesus in her room for three(!) days, until, exhausted, she finally fell asleep. When she woke, the baby was gone, restored to the statue.<sup>10</sup>

Some images demonstrated their holiness in other ways. Annually on Good Friday, an image of the Madonna and Child painted by Luke in San Sisto Vecchio, Rome, would pale.<sup>11</sup> On 3 July 1418, a Swiss soldier, coming out of a cabaret where "he had left his money and his reason," hacked at a statue of the Madonna and Child, in Paris at the intersection of the Rue aux Ours and what is now the Boulevard de Sébastopol. The statue, Notre-Dame de la Carole, bled, which was recognized as a miracle.<sup>12</sup> Also in France, a scoundrel threw a rock, which broke the arm off a Jesus statue. He dropped dead; a friend who tried to resuscitate him died painfully the next day. Blood charged with miraculous power poured from Jesus's broken arm.<sup>13</sup>

We can infer the sanctity of some images from how they were treated, even by non-human animals. One image of Madonna and Child, known for its ability to produce healing miracles, attained particular significance when a bird had stolen it from a window ledge where it had been placed to dry. It was later found in the garden under a "great number of birds [...] sitting and singing as if they had a special treat at hand."<sup>14</sup> Raphael's (1483–1520) painting of the *Christ Falling on the Way to Calvary* (called the "Spasimo") (1517), commissioned by a new monastery in Palermo, was lost when the ship carrying it wrecked off the Sicilian coast. The winds and waves "respected the beauty" of the work, Vasari tells us, and transported it, intact, miraculously, to Genoa. The trip back to Sicily was more difficult, and the pope had to intervene to pry it from the custody of the Genovese. In Palermo, it became more famous than the Etna volcano.<sup>15</sup>

Kissing an image could honour it and solicit its power. At the point in the liturgy where the priest was to kiss a cross image, the missal might include a

10 Giacomo Marcanese, *Vita della B. Lucia di Narni dell'Ordine di S. Domenico* (Viterbo: Diotallevi, 1663), 15–21.

11 *Mirabilia Romae*, ed. Gustavus Parthey (Berlin: Nicolai, 1869), 57.

12 Félix Lazare and Louis Lazare, *Dictionnaire administratif et historique des rues de Paris et de ses monuments* (Paris: F. Lazare, 1844–49), 511–12; Philippe Plagnieux, "D'une chapelle de la Vierge l'autre: l'exemple du prieuré clunisien de Saint-Martin-des-Champs à Paris," *Bulletin du centre d'études médiévales d'Auxerre* 6 (2013): 1–15 (8), <https://doi.org/10.4000/cem.12726>

13 *Vie et miracles de Notre Dame*, ed. Jean Miélot, BnF MS Fr. 9198, fol. 131r–32r.

14 Johannes Meyer, *Women's History in the Age of Reformation: Johannes Meyer's Chronicle of the Dominican Observance*, trans. Claire Taylor Jones (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2019), 88.

15 Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori ed architettori*, 14 vols. (Florence: Le Monnier, 1848), II, 183–84.

Crucifixion and even an additional cross designed for human lips.<sup>16</sup> The *Grandes Heures*, commissioned by Philip II the Bold (1342–1404) in 1376 (with images soon added) includes Veronicas (fol. 96r) sewn into the manuscript. Ducal grime remains on the images, suggesting that he touched and kissed it. The paint from the forehead of one Jesus (fol. 98r) had been scraped off. Perhaps the paint was then eaten, or added to water to be drunk, and the eyes might have been left intact so that Jesus could witness these devotions.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, a Flemish Book of Hours has an image of Jesus descending from the cross, where the Jesus image had been worn away by frequent kissing.<sup>18</sup> In the opposite direction, attacking an image might harm or hinder the figures it represented: in the Passion scenes in the sketchbook (ca. 1490) associated with Michael Wolgemut's (1434–1519) workshop, someone has attacked Jesus's tormentors with a knife or other sharp implement.<sup>19</sup>

Other images had a more human relationship to power. The Byzantine emperor gave a miracle-working Jesus image to Leonardo Montaldo (1319–84), the Doge of Genoa, who gave it to a local church in 1381.<sup>20</sup> Sometimes an image could end a drought through purely mundane mechanisms: a Mamluk sultan might have sent an image of the *Suffering Jesus*, known as the *Kwer'ata re'esu*, to the Ethiopian Emperor Dawit I (1382–1413) as an inducement to encourage them to undo their diverting of the Nile.<sup>21</sup> Ex-voto images recorded past miracles. Tommaso Inghirami (d. 1516), a humanist at the papal court, was seriously injured in 1508 when his mule ploughed into an oxcart. To show his gratitude

16 For example, the ca. 1460 North French Missal, BL Stowe MS 10, fol. 113v.

17 Philip the Good inherited it in 1404, added the images, and halved it into two volumes, Brussels, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, MS 11035-37 and Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, MS 3-1954. See Kathryn M. Rudy, "Eating the Face of Christ: Philip the Good and His Physical Relationship with Veronicas," *Convivium* 4 (2017): 168–79, <https://doi.org/10.1484/m.convilup-eb.5.131051>, and *The European Fortune of the Roman Veronica in the Middle Ages*, ed. Amanda Murphy, Herbert L. Kessler, Marco Petoletti, Eamon Duffy, and Guido Milanese (Turnhout: Brepolis, 2017), 168–79.

18 BL Harley MS 2985, fol. 71v.

19 Richard Bellm, *Wolgemuts Skizzenbuch in Berliner Kupferstichkabinett* (Baden-Baden: Heitz, 1959); Joseph Leo Koerner, *The Reformation of the Image* (London: Reaktion Books, 2004), 109–10 (figs. 46–48). See "Verspottung Christi," *bpk*, image number 00097095, <https://www.bpk-bildagentur.de/series/1.295111>

20 Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 333.

21 This is unlikely to be the similar image, perhaps of Flemish origins, that played a role in later Ethiopian political and military history. Stanisław Chojnacki, *The Kwer'ata re'esu: Its Iconography and Significance* (Naples: Istituto orientale di Napoli, 1985); Ignazio Guidi, "Due nuovi manoscritti della Cronaca Abbreviata di Abissinia," *Rendiconti della Reale Accademia dei Lincei* 6.2 (1926): 357–412 (360); Richard Pankhurst, "The History of the Kwer'ata re'esu: An Ethiopian Icon," *African Affairs* 81 (1982): 117–25.

for the divine intervention that saved his life, he commissioned an oil painting recording the accident, perhaps from Raphael (see Fig. 16.5).<sup>22</sup>



Fig. 16.5 Raphael(?), *Ex-voto of Tommaso Inghirami Fallen under an Ox-Cart* (ca. 1508), Museo del Tesoro, Basilica di San Giovanni in Lateran, Rome, Wikimedia, public domain, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ex-voto,\\_Tommaso\\_Inghirami,\\_Raphael.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ex-voto,_Tommaso_Inghirami,_Raphael.jpg)



Fig. 16.6 *Jesus and the Parrot: New Year's Wish* (1470), Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, public domain, <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b105055443/f1.item>

22 Paul Künzle, "Raffaels Denkmal für Fedro Inghirami auf dem letzten Arazzo," *Mélanges Eugène Tisserant* 6 (1964): 499–548.



Some images were ambiguous. One 1470 image of the Christ Child was essentially an early greeting card—its size (18 x 13 cm) coincides perfectly with the modern A7 envelope size (see Fig. 16.6). Here, Baby Jesus is joined by a bird and a scroll with wishes: *fil god jar* [very good year] and *e lange lebin* [a long life]. Its resemblance to our less powerful modern cards may disguise its potential power: it might well have been intended to be effective in making a year good and a life long.<sup>23</sup>

### Authentic Jesus Images

Some miraculous images drew their power from their authenticity.<sup>24</sup> Several categories of Jesus images were considered especially faithful representations. Some of these, like the Veil of Veronica and the Shroud of Turin (see Chapter 8), were created when Jesus's face or body, pressed onto cloth, left an impression. Images in this group were described as *acheiropoieton* [made without hand]. A second category, made with human hands, was created by artists who were eyewitnesses to Jesus: the Holy Face of Lucca and the Gregory Image. Two image types, the Lateran Palace Image and the Mandylion, have been included in either category. All the images in both groups, of course, were believed to have been made in the first century, during the lifetime of the historical Jesus, except for that of Gregory the Great, who was an eyewitness to an apparition of Jesus in the sixth century. A special but related case is the textual description of Jesus's appearance recorded by Publius Lentulus, another first-century eyewitness; later artists used that description to create faithful Jesus images.

Some images found their authenticity in the nature of their medium. An image of Mary and Jesus appeared, or could be seen, in the natural patterns of a slab of marble in the Hagia Sophia, images "as if they were in the clouds of heaven." A Castilian visitor reported a local tradition that "when this stone was cut, to be placed in this most holy place, the workmen saw these most wonderful and fortunate images on it, and, as this church was the most important one in

23 Peter W. Parshall and Rainer Schoch, ed., *Origins of European Printmaking: Fifteenth-century Woodcuts and their Public* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 2005), 198–200 (no. 53), reads this in a secular way.

24 Ernst von Dobschütz, *Christusbilder: Untersuchungen zur christlichen Legende*, 3 vols. (Leipzig: Hinrichs 1899), I; *Volto di Cristo*, ed. Giovanni Morello and Gerhard Wolf (Milan: Electa, 2000); Gerhard Wolf, "From Mandylion to Veronica: Picturing the 'Disembodied' Face Disseminating the True Image of Christ in the Latin West," in *The Holy Face and the Paradox of Representation*, ed. Herbert Kessler and Gerhard Wolf (Bologna: Nuova Alfa, 1998), 153–79.

the city, that stone was deposited in it.”<sup>25</sup> A tradition developed that a Franciscan in Jerusalem had taken, ca. 1400, a piece of wood from the Gethsemane Garden, which, carved into a Christ Child, became the Santo Bambino of Aracoeli (see Fig. 16.7).<sup>26</sup>



Fig. 16.7 *Christ Child* (ca. 1400?) (detail), Santa Maria in Aracoeli, Rome, photograph by Matthias Kabel (2009), Wikimedia, CC BY-SA 3.0, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Santa\\_Maria\\_in\\_Aracoeli\\_Rome\\_Santo\\_Bambino.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Santa_Maria_in_Aracoeli_Rome_Santo_Bambino.jpg)

In particular, the fifteenth century saw an increasing number of images attributed to St. Luke and therefore guaranteed in their authenticity.<sup>27</sup> An epigram on a copy of the Santa Maria del Popolo icon of Mary with Child asserts that the original was painted by Luke from life, and that the copy was commissioned

25 Ruy González de Clavijo, *Narrative of the Embassy of Ruy Gonzalez de Clavijjo to the Court of Timour at Samarcand*, ed. and trans. Clements R. Markham (London: Hakluyt Society, 1859), 38. See James Trilling, “The Image Not Made by Hands and the Byzantine Way of Seeing,” in *The Holy Face*, ed. Kessler and Wolf, 109–27.

26 Antonio da Cippessa, *Discorso storico intorno la prodigiosa effigie di Gesu Bambino* (Rome: Monaldi, 1861); Ursula Schlegel, “The Christchild as Devotional Image in Medieval Italian Sculpture,” *The Art Bulletin* 52 (1970): 1–10.

27 Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 46–77, 203–07, 311–13, 332–48, 531–42.

by Alessandro Sforza (1409–73), painted by Melozzo da Forlì (ca. 1438–94), and would have been recognized by Luke as his own. Another (lost) copy by Antoniazio Romano (ca. 1430–1510) affirms the Lucan origins and rhetorically asks, “Who would think that this was inauthentic [*errorem*]?”<sup>28</sup>

These various types were the most prominent “authentic” Jesus images, but there were traditions of other images with similar claims. One 1403 manuscript has an image of St. Irene painting a Holy Face.<sup>29</sup> A medieval legend recalled that a miraculous bust of Jesus appeared when Pope Sylvester I (285–335) consecrated San Giovanni Laterano.<sup>30</sup> Jesus hung a painting of himself as the Ancient of Days (Daniel 7:9) around the neck of the Ethiopian noblewoman Kristos Samra.<sup>31</sup>

Beyond their deep-ken abilities, these images indicate a plain-ken interest in the first-century Jesus, and for their mechanisms of replicating an appearance in spacetime, and in some cases for their antiquarian cultural enthusiasm.

### Holy Face of Lucca

The Holy Face of Lucca,<sup>32</sup> a larger-than-life-sized wooden Crucifixion, was said to have been carved by Nicodemus, an eyewitness to the removal of Jesus’s body from the cross (see Fig. 16.8). In keeping with its origins in the Near West, it wore a full-length tunic, in the Byzantine style. In the medieval period, copies of it were made and displayed throughout the Far West. Matthias of Janov (d. 1393/94) wrote that whenever he saw the Lucca image on a flag he had “always been terrified, my hair stood on end, because I thought of the coming of Christ to sit in judgment.”<sup>33</sup>

28 Corrado Ricci, *Umbria Santa*, trans. H. C. Stewart (New York: Oxford UP, 1927), 182.

29 Giovanni Boccaccio, *Livre des femmes nobles et renommées* [translation of *De Claris mulieribus*], BnF MS Fr. 598, fol. 92r

30 Kirstin Noreen, “Re-Covering Christ in Late Medieval Rome: The Icon of Christ in the Sancta Sanctorum,” *Gesta* 49 (2010): 77–150 (119–20).

31 Filāppos, *Atti di Krestos Samrā*, ed. Enrico Cerulli, *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* (Leuven: L. Durbecq, 1956), 11.

32 James Fishburne, “Renaissance Devotion and the Volto Santo of Lucca,” *Comitatus: A Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 41 (2010): 149–66, <https://doi.org/10.1353/cjm.2010.0024>; Nicolotti, *Sindone*, 120–26; Jean-Claude Schmitt, “Les images d’une image: La figuration du Volto Santo de Lucca dans les manuscrits enluminés du Moyen Âge,” in *The Holy Face*, ed. Kessler and Wolf, 205–27. Reproduced in Neil MacGregor and Erika Langmuir, *Seeing Salvation: Images of Christ in Art* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2000), 95 (fig. 30).

33 Matthias of Janov, from *Rules of the Old and New Testament* (ca. 1390), extracted in Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 540.



Fig. 16.8 Holy Face of Lucca, Lucca Cathedral, photograph by Joanbanjo (2011), Wikimedia, CC BY-SA 3.0, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Volto\\_Santo\\_de\\_Lucca.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Volto_Santo_de_Lucca.JPG)

Two subsequent legends grew up around it, both flourishing by 1400. First is the story of the fiddler: one pilgrim to Lucca, too poor to offer the relic a gift, instead played music, and received a silver shoe.<sup>34</sup> The second appears to come from the misperception that this crucified figure, because of the “dress,” was not Jesus, but a female saint. There was no plain-ken openness to the possibility that the tunic was a non-local, oriental costume. A backstory developed, or a pre-existing story was linked: the Portuguese princess Wilgefortis, disinclined to accept an arranged marriage, miraculously grew a beard so offensive to her suitor’s narrow standards of beauty that the wedding was cancelled; her father, infuriated, had her crucified. The Wilgefortis cult spread quickly and widely (see Fig. 16.9). For example, in the early fifteenth century, a smaller version of the Lucca Crucifixion floated up the Isar River in Bavaria. Recovered from the river, it was installed in a church at Neufahrn bei Freising and performed miracles, including restoring sight to a blind woman and blinding, temporarily, a painter who incorrectly painted it red instead of blue. A Wilgefortis cult developed, and the church was rededicated to Kumernis, the Saint’s local name.<sup>35</sup>

34 Koraljka Kos, “St. Kümernis and Her Fiddler (An Approach to Iconology of Pictorial Folk Art),” *Studia Musicologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 19 (1977): 251–66.

35 Ilse E. Friesen, *The Female Crucifix: Images of St. Wilgefortis Since the Middle Ages* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2001), esp. 70–73.



Fig. 16.9 *Scenes from the Life of St. Wilgefort* (ca. 1527) (detail), St. Wilgefortis Church, Neufahrn bei Freising, photograph by GFreihalter (2020), Wikimedia, CC BY-SA 3.0, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Neufahrn\\_bei\\_Freising\\_St\\_Wilgefortis\\_Chor\\_Tafelbilder\\_719.jpg?uselang=de](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Neufahrn_bei_Freising_St_Wilgefortis_Chor_Tafelbilder_719.jpg?uselang=de)

## The Gregory Image

A medieval mosaic, of some 50,000 pieces, representing the suffering Jesus (the Man of Sorrows) arrived in Santa Croce in Gerusalemme (Rome) around 1400. During or soon after arrival, it became understood to be a record of Jesus's appearance to Gregory the Great (d. 604).<sup>36</sup> Israhel van Meckenem's (ca. 1445–1503) engraved *Man of Sorrows* (1490s) has an explanatory inscription: "This image was made according to the model and likeness of that first image of the *Pietà*, preserved in the church of the Holy Cross in the Roman city, which the most holy Pope Gregory the Great had painted, according to a vision [...] shown to him from above" (see Fig. 16.10). The importance of this Man of Sorrows in Santa Croce made it a popular subject in art more broadly. This image is distinctive among those considered authentic, as the depiction was based on an appearance of Jesus centuries after his death.

36 Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 337–41; John Lansdowne, "The Micromosaic of the Man of Sorrows at Santa Croce in Gerusalemme in Rome" (PhD thesis, Princeton University, 2019). Scholarly consensus now is that it is a ca. 1300 Byzantine work arrived in Italy in the 1380s, maybe transported by Raimondello Orsini del Balzo from Sinai. See Carlo Bertelli, "The Image of Pity in Santa Croce in Gerusalemme," in *Essays in the History of Art Presented to Rudolf Wittkower*, ed. Douglas Fraser, Howard Hibbert, Milton J. Lewine (London: Phaidon, 1967), 40–55; C. A. Tsakiridou, *Tradition and Transformation in Christian Art: The Transcultural Icon* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), 40–52. An orthodox representational tradition, of Christ "the King of Glory" (Царь Славы), has a similar focus on the suffering Jesus.



Fig. 16.10 Israhel van Meckenem, *Man of Sorrows* (1490s), Albertina, Vienna, public domain, [https://sammlungenonline.albertina.at/?query=search=/record/objectnumbersearch=\[DG1926/1016\]&showtype=record](https://sammlungenonline.albertina.at/?query=search=/record/objectnumbersearch=[DG1926/1016]&showtype=record)

## Lateran Palace Image

An important Jesus icon was kept in the Sancta Sanctorum of the old Lateran Palace, the papal palace before the Vatican.<sup>37</sup> Today it is sometimes called *l'Acheropita del Sancta Sanctorum*, which we can abbreviate as LASS (see Fig. 16.11). One ca. 1100 account explains that the image was begun by Luke but “completed through the power of God by an angel.”<sup>38</sup> In the thirteenth century, Pope Innocent III (1161–1216) gave it a protective silver cover, with doors for feet. The cover provided protection not for the image, but for the viewer, as direct

37 Catherine Niehaus, “Appropriating Divinity: Iconography, Functionality, and Authority in Latium Acheropita Copies, ca. Twelfth-Fourteenth Centuries,” *Comitatus* 47 (2016): 37–68, <https://doi.org/10.1353/cjm.2016.0006>; Kirstin Noreen, “Revealing the Sacred: The Icon of Christ in the Sancta Sanctorum, Rome,” *Word & Image* 22 (2006): 228–37, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02666286.2006.10435751>

38 “De ecclesia sancti Laurentii in palatio,” in *Museum italicum*, ed. Jean Mabillon, 2 vols. (Paris: Montalant, 1724), II, 572–73.



viewing could cause blindness or death.<sup>39</sup> On the doors are representations of people worshipping a, or this, Jesus image.<sup>40</sup> Each August, during the feast of Mary's Assumption, the LASS would be brought in procession to Santa Maria Maggiore to visit that church's venerated Mary image. During that procession, this Jesus image had its feet, accessed through the cover's doors, washed a total of five times.<sup>41</sup>



Fig. 16.11 Lateran Palace Image, Lateran Palace, Rome, photograph by Sailko (2016), Wikimedia, CC BY 3.0, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Immagine\\_acheropita\\_entro\\_altare\\_argenteo\\_di\\_Innocenzo\\_III,\\_1198-1216\\_ca.\\_01.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Immagine_acheropita_entro_altare_argenteo_di_Innocenzo_III,_1198-1216_ca._01.jpg)

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- 39 Gerald of Wales, *Speculum Ecclesiae*, in *Opera*, ed. J. S. Brewer, 4 vols. (London: Longman, 1873), IV, 278; Gervasius of Tilbury, *Otia imperialia*, in *Christusbilder*, ed. Dobschütz, I, 292\*–93\*.
- 40 Kirstin Noreen, "Sacred Memory and Confraternal Space: The Insignia of the Confraternity of the Santissimo Salvatore (Rome)," in *Roma Felix: Formation and Reflections of Medieval Rome*, ed. Éamonn Ó Carragáin and Carol Neuman de Vegvar (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 159–87 (175), suggests the horizontal strip under Jesus on the first door references the silver cover, but I propose it refers to the icon itself: the cover goes up to Jesus's chin, while the strip is lower, making his shoulder tops visible.
- 41 Giovanni Marangoni, *Istoria dell'antichissimo oratorio, o cappella di San Lorenzo* (Rome: San Michele, 1747), 120–28. See Ernst Kitzinger, "A Virgin's Face: Antiquarianism in Twelfth-Century Art," *The Art Bulletin* 62 (1980): 6–19; Noreen, "Sacred Memory," 171.

Many copies of the LASS were made, mostly in Italy or by Italians. A fourteenth-century close copy, which included the universe-body of the coverless image, was at the Chiesa di San Biagio (Palombara Sabina). Later in that century, a fresco of it was made in the Santissima Annunziata Cathedral, Montecosaro. One painted copy was made ca. 1400 at Montecassino Abbey, and another, later in the century, at the Scriptorium di Castelnuovo. Antoniazzo Romano or his workshop made two copies (ca. 1490–1502), one now in Madrid (see Fig. 16.12), and another in Ancona’s cathedral before it was destroyed in World War II.<sup>42</sup>

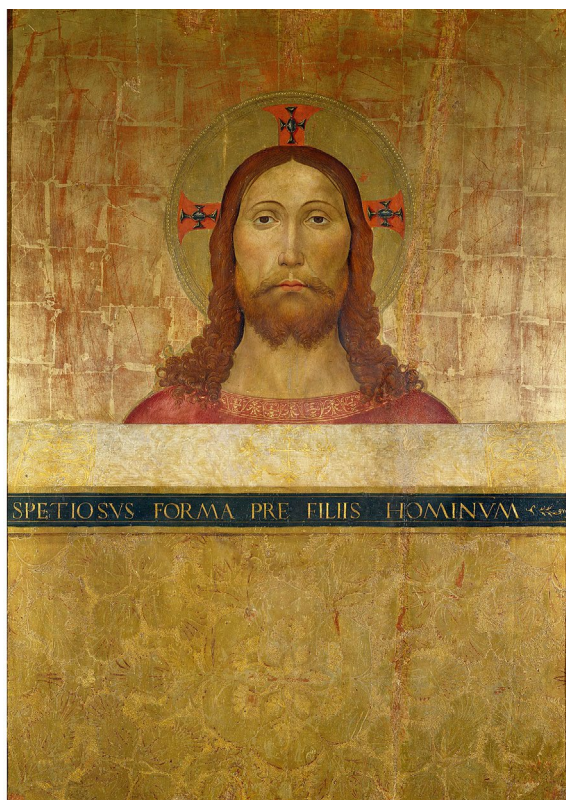


Fig. 16.12 Antoniazzo Romano workshop, copy of Lateran Palace Image (ca. 1490–1502), Museo del Prado, Madrid, Wikimedia, public domain, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Antoniazzo\\_Romano\\_Tr%C3%ADptico\\_con\\_busto\\_de\\_Cristo\\_entre\\_San\\_Juan\\_Bautista\\_y\\_San\\_Pedro,\\_San\\_Juan\\_Evangelista\\_y\\_Santa\\_Colomba.\\_Tabla\\_centro.\\_87\\_x\\_62\\_cm.\\_Portezuelas.\\_94\\_x\\_35\\_cm.\\_Museo\\_del\\_Prado.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Antoniazzo_Romano_Tr%C3%ADptico_con_busto_de_Cristo_entre_San_Juan_Bautista_y_San_Pedro,_San_Juan_Evangelista_y_Santa_Colomba._Tabla_centro._87_x_62_cm._Portezuelas._94_x_35_cm._Museo_del_Prado.jpg)

42 Giovanni Russo, “Antoniazzo Romano” (PhD thesis, Università degli Studi di Napoli “Federico II,” 2014), 151–54, 188–91.



## Mandyllion, or the Image of Edessa

According to tradition, in the first century, Abgar V, King of Osroene, had sent a messenger named Ananias to Jesus to ask for medical aid, and upon arrival Ananias painted Jesus's portrait.<sup>43</sup> Some versions remembered that Jesus was in fact too bright to be painted, so Jesus washed his face and used a towel for drying, which was imprinted with his image.<sup>44</sup> Whether painted or printed, the resulting image became known as the Image of Edessa, the capital of Osroene, or as the Mandyllion, from an Arabic word for "a cloth."<sup>45</sup>

By 1400, the Mandyllion or a copy of it was claimed both in the Sainte-Chapelle in Paris (in 1239, Emperor Baldwin II had sold it, with the Crown of Thorns, to the Venetians, who sold both to Louis of France)<sup>46</sup> as well as in San Bartolomeo degli Armeni in Genoa.<sup>47</sup> The presence of two additional Mandyllion candidates in Rome (including the one in San Silvestro in Capite) led to long debates about authenticity, and more pragmatic decisions to favour one cult over another.<sup>48</sup> In 1517, the Silvestro in Capite Mandyllion was suppressed to avoid rivalling the prestige of Rome's Veronica (see below).

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- 43 Albert M. Ammann, "Due immagini del cosiddetto Cristo di Edessa," *Rendiconti della Pontificia Accademia d'Archeologia* 38 (1965–66): 185–94; Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 208–15; Dobschütz, *Christusbilder*, I, 185–87; Herbert L. Kessler, *Spiritual Seeing: Picturing God's Invisibility in Medieval Art* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 70–86; Steven Runciman, "Some Remarks on the Image of Edessa," *The Cambridge Historical Journal* 3 (1931): 238–52. For diffusion of images see Wilhelm Grimm, "Die Sage vom Ursprung der Christusbilder," in *Kleinere Schriften*, ed. Gustav Hinrichs, 4 vols. (Berlin: Dümmlers, 1883), III, 166–73.
- 44 Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, "Narratio de imagine edessena," in *Scripta quae reperiri potuerunt omnia*, in *Patrologia Graeca*, ed. J.-P. Migne, 161 vols. (Paris: Migne, 1858), CXIII, col. 421–54. See Alexei Lidov, "The Miracle of Reproduction: The Mandyllion and Keramion as a Paradigm of the Sacred Space," in *L'immagine di Cristo dall'acheropita alla mano d'artista*, ed. Christoph L. Frommel and Gerhard Wolf (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 2006), 18–19; Andrea Nicolotti, *From the Mandyllion of Edessa to the Shroud of Turin* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 7–28, <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004278523>. On one occasion Francis of Paola, asked for a portrait, pressed his face onto a tablecloth, which kept the image. Gino J. Simi and Mario M. Segreti, *St. Francis of Paola* (Rockford: Tan, 1977), 106.
- 45 Franz Rosenthal, "A Note on the Mandil," in *Four Essays on Art and Literature in Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 63–99.
- 46 On the thirteenth-century transfer of relics (including crown and mandyillion) to Paris, see Fernand de Mély, *Exuviae sacrae constantinopolitanae*, 2 vols. (Paris: Leroux, 1878), II, 135–36 (no. 80). See Nicolotti, *From the Mandyllion*, 188–203.
- 47 Colette Dufour Bozzo, "La cornice del Volto Santo di Genova," *Cahiers archéologiques: Fin de l'antiquité et moyen-âge* 19 (1969): 223–30.
- 48 Giuseppe Carletti, *Memorie storico-critiche della chiesa e monastero di S. Silvestro in Capite* (Rome: Pilucchi Cracas, 1795), 94–108. See Carlo Bertelli, "Storia e vicende dell'immagine edessena di S. Silvestro in Capite a Roma," *Paragone* 217 (1968): 3–33; Mariano da Firenze, *Itinerarium urbis Romae*, ed. Enrico Bulletti (Rome: Pontificio istituto di archeologia cristiana, 1931), 215–16; Nicolotti, *From the Mandyllion*, 182–87.

The Keramion was a tile, or multiple tiles, bearing the imprint of Jesus's image from the Mandylion. At least one was thought to have been brought to Georgia. It has been identified both with an icon kept in the Martqopi Monastery, until lost during Timur's invasions (1386–1403), and with an icon that in our period was at the Ancha Monastery.<sup>49</sup>

The Mandylion's origin story also became a subject for art, as in two images from the 1410s: Lluís Borrassà's (ca. 1360–1426) altarpiece for a Franciscan convent in Catalonia,<sup>50</sup> and a miniature in a manuscript of the *Fleur des histoires de la terre d'Orient* [Flower of Histories from the Orient], written by the Armenian prince Hayton of Corycys (d. ca. 1310) to encourage crusading (see Fig. 16.13).



Fig. 16.13 Egerton or Bedford Master, *Creation of the Mandylion* (ca. 1410–12), BnF MS Fr. 2810, fol. 230r, public domain, <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10021503v/f463.item>

- 49 Ekaterine Gedevisashvili, "Encounters of Eastern and Western Christianity: Iconographic Peculiarities of the Holy Face of Telavi," in *Synergies in Visual Culture / Bildkulturen im Dialog*, ed. Nicola Suthor, Annette Hoffmann, Manuela De Giorgi, and Laura Veneskey (Leiden: Brill, 2013) 33–43 (33–34), [https://doi.org/10.30965/9783846754665\\_004](https://doi.org/10.30965/9783846754665_004); Irma Karaulashvili, "A Short Overview of the Nationalised Peculiarities of the Abgar Legend in Georgian, Armenian and Slavonic Traditions," *Scripta & e-Scripta* 11–12 (2012): 171–84; Alexei Lidov, "Holy Face, Holy Script, Holy Gate: Revealing the Edessa Paradigm in Christian Imagery," in *Intorno al Sacro Volto*, ed. A.R. Calderoni Masetti, C. Dufour Bozzo, and G. Wolf (Venice: Marsilio, 2007), 195–212; Nicolotti, *From the Mandylion*, 160–62.
- 50 Lluís Borrassà, *Altarpiece Dedicated to Saint Francis* (1414–15), Museu Episcopal de Vic, Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Lluís\\_Borrassà#/media/File:Borrassa\\_retaule\\_advocacio\\_franciscana\\_2081.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Lluís_Borrassà#/media/File:Borrassa_retaule_advocacio_franciscana_2081.jpg). See Maria Portmann, "Converting Jews through Preaching and Painting in the Kingdom of Aragon, ca. 1400," in *Jews and Muslims Made Visible in Christian Iberia and Beyond, 14<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, ed. Borja Franco Llopis and Antonio Urquizar-Herrera (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 70–88 (70–75).

## Veronica

The Mandylion was not alone in receiving an imprint of Jesus's face. In the Far West, the most popular reproduction was the Veil of Veronica.<sup>51</sup> Tradition remembered a woman named Veronica who used her veil to wipe the sweat from Jesus's face as he carried his cross. The veil retained an image of his face. "Veronica" may be the Latin version of her name, or, reflecting the importance of the veil, a play on words *veram iconiam* [true icon]. It was also called the *Sudarium* [sweat-cloth]. The veil was understood to be kept in the Vatican, where it attracted so much popular interest that the loss of life in a stampede was a real danger. Its fate became uncertain during the 1527 Sack of Rome. Contemporaries variously reported it as unmolested, burned, or stolen to be passed through the city's taverns en route to oblivion.<sup>52</sup>

A number of powerful copies were made, either miraculously or by human hand. One was sent, according to tradition, in the thirteenth century, to the nuns at Montreuil Abbey (Laon),<sup>53</sup> with a note urging them not to be distressed by the dark complexion, caused by "the sun and heat of his tribulations."<sup>54</sup> Two

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- 51 Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 218–24, 371–73; Dobschütz, *Christusbilder*, I, 197–262; Gabriele Finaldi, *The Image of Christ* (London: National Gallery, 2000), 80–83; Jeffrey F. Hamburger, "«Frequentant memoriam visionis faciei meae»: Image and Imitation in the Devotions to the Veronica attributed to Gert[r]ude of Helfta," in *The Holy Face and the Paradox of Representation*, ed. Herbert L. Kessler (Bologna: Nuova Alfa, 1998), 229–46; Karl Pearson, *Die Fronica: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Christusbildes* (Strassburg: Trübner, 1887), 94–141.
- 52 Giovanni Salviati to Baldassarre Castiglione, Paris, 8 June 1527, extracted in Ludwig Pastor, *The History of the Popes*, trans. Ralph Francis Kerr, 18 vols. (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1910), IX, 505–07; Marcello Alberini, *I Ricodi*, ed. Domenico Orano, *Il Sacco di Roma 1* (Rome: Fornazi, 1901), 333; Marino Sanuto, *I Diarii*, ed. Federico Stefani, Guglielmo Berchet, and Nicolò Barozzi, 58 vols. (Venice: n.p., 1879–1903), XLV, col. 192; Pero Tafur, *Andanças é Viajes* (Madrid: Ginesta, 1874), 26.
- 53 *Holy Face*, Laon Cathedral, Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Îcône\\_Sainte\\_Face\\_Laon\\_150808.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Îcône_Sainte_Face_Laon_150808.jpg). See Andre Grabar, *La Sainte Face de Laon: le Mandylion dans l'art orthodoxe* (Prague: Seminarium Kondakovianum, 1930). Nicole Sabour, *La Sainte Face de Laon* (MA thesis, Université de Montréal, 2017).
- 54 Jean-Jacques Chifflet, *De linteis sepulchralibus Christi servatoris crisis historica* (Antwerp: n.p., 1624), 207–08. Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 218, summarizes the explanation of the dark complexion as "the sunburn that Jesus had acquired on his wanderings through Palestine." Stephen Perkinson, *Likeness of the King: A Prehistory of Portraiture in Late Medieval France* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 75–78, <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226658810.001.0001> mostly follows Belting. In contrast to these plain-ken reads, Jacques Pantaléon, the future Urban IV, explains the darkness in terms of a farmer's tan, but does not suggest that Jesus was such a farmer; rather he, with the deep ken, is speaking of Jesus metaphorically working in the field which is this world. He cites the Song of Songs. While the source does, with the plain ken, contrast Jesus with those "qui

travelled to Spain, becoming known as the *Santo Rostro* of the Cathedral of Jaén and, arriving in the 1480s, as the *Santa Faz* of Alicante. Locals used the latter in a procession to create rain, and it miraculously wept.<sup>55</sup> Sometimes, these were referred to as mandylions, or copies of the Mandylion; contemporary sources did not carefully distinguish.

We can see another example of the transmission and copying in Central Europe. In 1368, a copy of the Rome Veronica was created, and brought to Prague's St. Vitus Cathedral by Charles IV (1316–78).<sup>56</sup> Around 1400, a copy of the copy was made, which eventually, by the eighteenth century, came to the St. Mary Magdalene Church in Wrocław.<sup>57</sup> The fifteenth-century(?) *Holy Face* in Saint Margaret's Basilica, Nowy Sącz may also have been a copy of Charles IV's.<sup>58</sup>

In some images, oriented towards the deep ken, the Jesus face on the veil is more real than the veil.<sup>59</sup> It defies the spatial limitations of its cloth medium. Some Veronicas ignore the concavity of the veil, or its folds, or its shadows. We see divergence even among the works of a single artist. Of these two Veronicas painted by Hans Memling (ca. 1430–94), one's veil shows a real Jesus, the other an illusionistic relic.<sup>60</sup> Sometimes the halo lines' rays appear to be before the veil and behind the face, essentially forcing the face out in front of the veil (see

semper resident sub aere temperate frigido," to emphasize the physical reality of the Near West the general tenor of the passage orients itself to the Song of Songs.

- 55 Vicente Martínez Colomer, *Historia de la provincia de Valencia de la regular observancia de S. Francisco*, 2 vols. (Valencia: Faulí, 1803), I, 169; María Amparo López Arandia, "Aproximación a un tratado ilustrado sobre el Santo Rostro de Jaén," *Boletín del Instituto de Estudios Giennenses* 171 (1999): 29–45; Manuel López Pérez, *El Santo Rostro de Jaén* (Jaén: Agrupación de Cofradías y Hermandades de la Ciudad de Jaén, 1995); Rafael Esplá Rizo, *La Santísima Faz de Nuestro Señor Jesucristo* (Alicante: Serra, 1962).
- 56 Image and information available at *Veronica Route*, <https://veronicaroute.com/1368/03/07/1368/>. See Klára Benešová, "Forgotten Paths to 'Another' Renaissance: Prague and Bohemia, c. 1400," in *Renaissance? Perceptions of Continuity and Discontinuity in Europe, c.1300–c.1550*, ed. Alexander Lee, Harry Schnitker, and Pierre Péporté (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 289–310 (293–94, 300), <https://doi.org/10.1163/ej.9789004183346.i-370.47>; Pearson, *Die Fronica*, 97.
- 57 See "Denarius (Royal Type)," *Digital Collections of the National Museum in Warsaw*, <https://cyfrowe.mnw.art.pl/en/catalog/603043>
- 58 See "Obraz," *Parafia pw. Św. Małgorzaty w Nowym Sączu*, <https://www.bazylika.org.pl/obraz.html> and *Veronica Route*, <https://veronicaroute.com/1390/06/28/xiv-16/>
- 59 Noa Turel, *Living Pictures: Jan van Eyck and Painting's First Century* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2020), 30–8.
- 60 Hans Memling, *Triptych of Jan Floreins*, 1479, Memlingmuseum, Bruges, Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hans\\_Memling\\_-\\_Triptych\\_of\\_Jan\\_Floreins\\_\(reverse\)\\_-\\_WGA14894.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hans_Memling_-_Triptych_of_Jan_Floreins_(reverse)_-_WGA14894.jpg); Hans Memling, *Saint Veronica*, ca. 1475, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, <https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.41659.html>

Fig. 16.14).<sup>61</sup> Resisting folds sometimes created an illusion of the face floating in front of the veil.<sup>62</sup> This can best be seen in three dimensions, when a sculpture shows Jesus's face projecting out from the flat veil.<sup>63</sup>



Fig. 16.14 Masters of Zweder van Culemborg, *Man of Sorrows*, *Book of Hours* (ca. 1430s) (detail), Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, MS W.168, fol. 128v, CC BY 3.0, <https://www.thedigitalwalters.org/Data/WaltersManuscripts/html/W168/>

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- 61 E.g., *Book of Hours* (ca. 1430s), Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, MS W.168, fol. 128v, <https://www.thedigitalwalters.org/Data/WaltersManuscripts/html/W168/description.html>; see also Master E. S., *St Veronica Engraving* (1450–67), British Museum, London, [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P\\_1895-1214-113](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1895-1214-113)
- 62 See Simon von Taisten, *Saint Veronica with the Veil* (1496), Kapelle Zur Allerheiligsten Dreifaltigkeit Auf Schloss Bruck, Austria, <https://veronicaroute.com/1496/02/17/1496-6/>. Here, there is consonance between the cloth and Jesus's eyes, both drooping.
- 63 See the Veil of Veronica sculpture, polychrome stone, tomb of the Archbishop Werner von Falkenstein (d. 1418) (behind the shield held by angels behind the Archbishop's head), Basilica of St. Castor, Koblenz, <https://veronicaroute.com/1418/12/29/1418/>. For more examples, see Jeffrey F. Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany* (New York: Zone, 1998), 89, 100 and Noa Turel, "Living Pictures: Rereading 'au vif' 1350–1550," *Gesta* 50 (2011): 163–82 (170, fig. 9), <https://doi.org/10.2307/41550555>



Fig. 16.15 Master of Delft workshop, *Carrying the Cross* (ca. 1475–1500), Louvre, Paris, photograph by Sailko (2013), Wikimedia, CC BY-SA 3.0, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Maestro\\_di\\_delft\\_cristo\\_portacroce\\_1490\\_ca..JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Maestro_di_delft_cristo_portacroce_1490_ca..JPG)

Some Veronica images depict the process of imprinting the face onto the veil, but approach it in very different ways. One Dutch engraving shows the veil, just imprinted, having merely a smudge, illegible but illusionistic in a plain-ken manner.<sup>64</sup> A German altarpiece shows the imprinted veil with a Jesus face more abstract than that on the Jesus bearing the cross. Veronica's arm gets in the way, as per plain-ken space, blocking most of the veil face.<sup>65</sup> Ridolfo Ghirlandaio's (1483–1561) *The Procession to Calvary* (ca. 1505) has Jesus's face in the veil directly facing the viewer, even as the actual Jesus's face is turned aside in profile.<sup>66</sup> A Dutch painting downplays the copying process. Here, Veronica has already turned away from Jesus, more focused on the relic than

64 E.g., Lucas van Leyden, *Christ Carrying the Cross* (1521), hand-coloured engraving, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/nl/collectie/RP-P-2011-115-8>

65 Ascent to Calvary, altar (1470–90), German, Wallraf-Richartz-Museum & Fondation Corboud, Cologne, <https://veronicaroute.com/1470/01/19/1470-1490-5/>

66 Ridolfo Ghirlandaio, *The Procession to Calvary* (ca. 1505), National Gallery, London, <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/ridolfo-ghirlandaio-the-procession-to-calvary>

on Jesus himself. The veil is translucent, so the face is almost floating in space, but her facing away means that the two Jesus faces, original and copy, are both facing the same direction, reinforcing the sense of fidelity (see Fig. 16.15).<sup>67</sup> One Italian painting of the Sudarium prominently includes an IHS-halo and blood on Jesus's face. Are these imprints of the original (in which case the lettering "should" be reversed), or are they merely adorning the copy?<sup>68</sup>

Ugo da Carpi's (fl. 1502–32) altarpiece for St. Peter's in Rome (ca. 1524–27)<sup>69</sup> was originally located near the chamber with the Veronica itself. It bore an inscription, *Per Vgo / da Carpi Intaiatore / fata senza / penello*, that is, "Ugo da Carpi the engraver made without a brush." This alludes to the idea that the Veronica was made "without human hands." He worked off a preparatory drawing by Parmigianino (1503–40) but took away the three-dimensional effects from the face; with shading and shadows replaced by solid abstraction, the face appears to float above the cloth. Michelangelo (1475–1564) and Vasari (1511–74) later laughed at the "without a brush" inscription, and the former, critical of the finished product, snipped that maybe Ugo should have used a brush after all.<sup>70</sup> A close examination reveals that he used a woodblock to print Jesus's face on the panel, and then finger-painted it. Thus, it was made without a brush, and it, like the original Veronica, involved a process of imprinting.

Miniature versions of the Veronica, called vernicles, were popular in the Far West.<sup>71</sup> The Hours of Philip the Bold had well-used vernicles sewn in,<sup>72</sup> and one German prayerbook for nuns had a darkened vernicle glued in.<sup>73</sup> The Pardoner in Geoffrey Chaucer's (ca. 1340s–1400) *Canterbury Tales* had a vernicle sewn into

67 Master of Delft or workshop or circle, *Carrying the Cross* (ca. 1475–1500), Louvre, Paris, <https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010066468>

68 *Sudarium of St. Veronica* (Italian, ca. 1450), Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/nl/collectie/SK-A-3994>

69 The altarpiece is now in L'Archivio della Fabbrica di San Pietro. Parmigianino's preparatory *Drawing for the Saint Veronica Altarpiece*, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi, Florence, n. 13554 F, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Drawings\\_by\\_Parmigianino\\_in\\_the\\_Uffizi\\_Gallery#/media/File:Parmigianino\\_-\\_inv\\_13554\\_F.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Drawings_by_Parmigianino_in_the_Uffizi_Gallery#/media/File:Parmigianino_-_inv_13554_F.jpg). Nicole Blackwood, "Printmaker as Painter: Looking Closely at Ugo da Carpi's Saint Veronica Altarpiece," *Oxford Art Journal* 36 (2013): 167–84, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/oxartj/kct015>

70 Vasari, *Le vite*, V, 421–22.

71 For a statistical analysis of Veronica images/copies, see Amanda C. Murphy, Felicita Mornata, and Rafaella Zardoni, "From Copies to an Original: The Contribution of Statistical Methods," in *La svolta inevitabile: sfide e prospettive per l'informatica umanistica*, ed. Cristina Marras, Marco Passarotti, Greta Franzini, and Eleonora Litta (Milan: Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, 2020), 178–84.

72 Brussels, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, MS 11035-37, fol. 97r, <https://uurl.kbr.be/1768650>

73 *Gebetbuch für Nonnen*, BSB Cgm 12, fol. 1v, <https://www.digitale-sammlungen.de/en/view/bsb00095487?page=8,9>. For vernicles, see Hamburger, *Visual*, 329–31.

his hat.<sup>74</sup> Veronicas would be made in reverse and imprinted onto surfaces.<sup>75</sup> The Veronica was one of several Jesus images popular as paper watermarks from the 1390s.<sup>76</sup> Vernicles appeared on coins,<sup>77</sup> as rings<sup>78</sup> and as brass pilgrim badges.<sup>79</sup>

In practice, only vague borders separate the LASS, the Mandylion, and the Veronica. Nineteenth-century scholarship has sharpened those borders artificially. The Jaén image is usually classified as a Veronica, but is more similar to the Genoa and San Silvestro images (usually classified as mandylions) than to the Laon Veronica. Genoa-Silvestro-Jaén visually form a type. In comparison, the Laon Veronica is more illusionistic (and so plain ken), while the LASS is more abstract in its features (and so more deep ken). One German Veronica (ca. 1420s) even replaces the veil with a mandorla, blurring the edges of the category of Veronicas.<sup>80</sup>

### The Lentulus Letter

Before our period, a number of textual descriptions of Jesus's appearance circulated. Christians used the Old Testament and logic to argue that Jesus was especially beautiful, especially ugly, or polymorphic—shifting his shape to take on an appearance appropriate to the circumstance.<sup>81</sup> Muslims had their own parallel traditions. Ibn Arabi (1165–1240) described Jesus as “a man who is like unto his father [Gabriel or the Spirit of God], who is non-Arab, well-proportioned in his physical make-up, and of medium height.”<sup>82</sup> Al-Suyuti (1445–1505) cited a hadith collected by al-Bukhari (810–70): Jesus was “of medium height, brown, as if he had come out of an underground passage, that is, a bathhouse.”<sup>83</sup>

74 Geoffrey Chaucer, *General Prologue*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson and F. N. Robinson (Boston, MA: Houghton-Mifflin, 1987), 34 (line 685).

75 Hamburger, *Visual*, 338.

76 Etienne Midoux and Auguste Matton, *Étude sur les filigranes des papiers employés en France aux XIVe et XVe siècles* (Paris: Dumoulin, 1868), 22–23, nos. 1, 10.

77 For example, the papal ducat (1464–71) with Veronica and her veil. Image reproduced at *Veronica Route*, <https://veronicaroute.com/1467/10/29/1464-1471-2/>; Arthur L. Friedberg and Ira S. Friedberg, *Gold Coins of the World from Ancient Times to the Present*, 9th ed. (Williston, ND: Coin and Currency Institute, 2017), 773.

78 Visa Immonen, “Medieval Vernicle Finger Rings in Finland,” *Formvännan* 99 (2004): 103–18.

79 See pilgrim badge (fifteenth century), British Museum, London, [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H\\_1855-0625-16](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1855-0625-16)

80 Anonymous, *The Holy Face of Christ-Vera Icon* (ca. 1420–30), Gemäldegalerie, Berlin, Nr. 1217.

81 Gilbert Dagron, “Holy Images and Likeness,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 45 (1991): 23–33.

82 Ibn al-'Arabi, *Jawab al-Mustaqim* (1206–07), quoted in Gerald T. Elmore, *Islamic Sainthood in the Fullness of Time* (Brill: Leiden, 1999), 593.

83 Al-Suyuti, *Le parfait manuel des sciences coraniques: al-Itqān fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān de Galāl ad-Dīn as-Suyūṭī* (849/1445–911/1505), trans. Michel Lagarde (Leiden: Brill,



As we approach the period under study such traditions continued, sometimes with unexpected variations. A Wycliffite belief held that Jesus, in heaven, was “seue fote [seven foot] in fourme and figure of flesshe and blode.”<sup>84</sup> Some people saw Jesus themselves and recorded his appearance. For example, in Basel, Jesus appeared to the lay woman called the Selige Schererin, the “pious shearer” (d. 1409), and “showed on his face how he was handled or formed when he was in the savage hands of the Jews, who held him in prison. And his face was a dark brown-yellow because of his distress...”<sup>85</sup>

The most important description, with the boldest claim on authority, was called the Lentulus Letter.<sup>86</sup> The letter appeared to be authored by a Roman official Publius Lentulus, who had personally seen Jesus, and recorded his appearance. Jesus’s height was moderate (*mediocris*). His unripe-hazelnut hair (*coloris nucis avellane premature*) was smooth as far as his ears, where it curled and darkened. His moderately ruddy face was “without wrinkle or blemish,” and his “copious” beard colour-consonant (*concolorem*) with his hair. The letter concluded by confirming a line from the Psalms (45:2 [44:3]), which “with merit” praised an “appearance beautiful in comparison with the sons of men” (*speciosus forma prae filiis hominum*).<sup>87</sup> Aspects of the Lentulus description echoed those of several medieval Greek manuscripts, ranging from theologian John of Damascus (d. 749) to historian Nikephoros Kallistos Xanthopoulos (d. ca. 1335).

Lorenzo Valla’s (1407–57) denunciation of this “vicious and spurious” source did nothing to detract from its popularity.<sup>88</sup> At least five Latin versions

2018), 1142, <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004357112>

84 Anne Hudson, ed., *Selections from English Wycliffite Writings* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 17.

85 “Von der seligen Schererin” (1409), reproduced in Hans-Jochen Schiewer, “Auditionen und Visionen einer Begine: Die ‘Selige Schererin’, Johannes Mulberg und der Basler Beginenstreit,” in *Die Vermittlung geistlicher Inhalte im deutschen Mittelalter*, ed. Timothy R. Jackson, Nigel F. Palmer und Almut Suerbaum (Tübingen: De Gruyter, 1996), 289–318 (313), <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110939743.289>

86 Shindo Jun 新藤淳, “Profile Icons: On the ‘Portrait’ of Christ on the Eve of the Reformation 横顔のアイコン—宗教改革前夜におけるキリストの「肖像」について,” *Bulletin of the National Museum of Western Art 国立西洋美術館研究紀要* 13 (2009): 5–27; J. K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 542–43; Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance* (New York: Zone, 2010), 250–74.

87 Michele Savonarola, *Speculum physonomie*, BnF MS Lat. 7357, fol. 54r. See Dobschütz, *Christusbilder*, II, 308\*\*–30\*\*, with the text at 319\*\*; Cora E. Lutz, “The Letter of Lentulus Describing Christ,” *The Yale University Library Gazette* 50 (1975): 91–97. For background, see Joseph Ziegler, “Cuius facies est deformis, mores habere bonos non potest nisi raro: Reflections on the Notion of Deformity in Medieval Learned Physiognomy,” in *Deformità fisica e identità della persona tra medioevo ed età moderna*, ed. Gian Maria Varanini (Florence: Firenze UP, 2015), 181–97.

88 Lorenzo Valla, *The Treatise of Lorenzo Valla on the Donation of Constantine*, trans. Christopher B. Coleman (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1922), 143.

were written out in the fourteenth century, and at least thirty-five in the fifteenth, alongside translation into vernacular languages.<sup>89</sup> The fifteenth-century texts tend to have more elaborate framing devices that speak to plain-ken expectations, giving details—names or dates—of the discovery of the manuscript earlier in the century. The text was influenced by, and published in, Ludolph of Saxony's (ca. 1295–1378) *Life of Christ* (1474).<sup>90</sup> Drawing on Lentulus, which he quoted in its entirety, the physician Michele Savonarola (1385–1468), grandfather of the famous Girolamo, linked Jesus with the physiognomy of the normative (*temperatus*) human, with an emphasis on moderation (*mediocritas*): moderate height, moderate hands and feet, colour neither too red nor too white. That is, he used the deep ken to extrapolate human-biology norms from Jesus's appearance.<sup>91</sup>

Like a police sketch artist today, fifteenth-century artists transformed the words of the Lentulus Letter into visual representations of Jesus. The text created a basic framework, but a number of artistic decisions had to be made to create a plain-ken illusionistic image. New visual image would have to be added to what the text dictated.<sup>92</sup> This ambiguity allowed for a variety of interpretation, and the various exemplars varied significantly in their details; by fitting within the textually defined parameters, these could “check the box” of authenticity.

Early on, the image appeared most prominently in medals. The medal was a classical medium that enjoyed a revival during the Renaissance.<sup>93</sup> In the 1450s, Matteo de' Pasti (1412–68) made a medal based on the Lentulus description (see Fig. 16.16). Note that the nimbus is a cross-section, in perspective. The reverse text identifies him as the author.<sup>94</sup> A similar sketch, probably contemporary, perhaps preparatory, exists in an album of drawings by Pisanello (d. ca. 1450/55), de'

89 Dobschutz, *Christusbilder*, II, 308\*–29\*\*. For example, *Rubricae, prologi, argumenta librorum bibliae*, BSB Clm 19608, 201v, <https://www.digitale-sammlungen.de/en/view/bsb00102998?page=410,411>

90 Irena Backus, *Historical Method and Confessional Identity in the Era of the Reformation, 1378–1615* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 259, <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004476172>; Nagel and Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance*, 245–46.

91 Savonarola, *Speculum physonomie*, fol. 54rb.

92 Christopher S. Wood, *Forgery, Replica, Fiction: Temporalities of German Renaissance Art* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 155–64.

93 Brigit Blass-Simmen, “The Medal’s Contract,” in *Inventing Faces*, ed. Mona Körte (Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2013), 20–43.

94 Matteo de' Pasti, Jesus medallion (ca. 1450), Museo del Bargello, Florence, Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Matteo\\_de%27\\_pasti\\_medaglia\\_di\\_ges%C3%B9\\_cristo\\_recto.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Matteo_de%27_pasti_medaglia_di_ges%C3%B9_cristo_recto.JPG). Another exemplar is in the Münzkabinett der Staatlichen Museen, Berlin, <https://ikmk.smb.museum/object?lang=en&id=18228298>

Pasti's teacher.<sup>95</sup> This medal likely informed a similar one, gilt silver.<sup>96</sup> It also inspired rectangular plaquettes, made of bronze.<sup>97</sup>



Fig. 16.16 Matteo de' Pasti, Jesus medallion (ca. 1450), Museo del Bargello, Florence, photograph by Sailko (2013), Wikimedia, CC BY-SA 3.0, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Matteo\\_de%27\\_pasti,\\_medaglia\\_di\\_gesù\\_cristo,\\_recto.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Matteo_de%27_pasti,_medaglia_di_gesù_cristo,_recto.JPG)

A second wave of Lentulus portrait medals, in bronze, occurred ca. 1500, probably in Florence. The reverses had texts, one of which explained the authority of the image: the Emperor Tiberius (rl. AD 14–37) had been so moved by the Lentulus Letter that he commissioned an emerald cameo as a visualization of the textual description. In 1482, Sultan Bayezid II (1447–1512) sent Pope Sixtus IV (1414–84) just such an emerald cameo, now lost, engraved with a Jesus portrait—like the Lance (see Chapter 8), this was a thank-you for keeping the Sultan's brother out of the way in Rome. The emerald was then used as the model for the medal.<sup>98</sup>

95 Antonio Pisanello, *Projet du droit une médaille à effigie du Christ, en buste, de profil*, Louvre, Paris, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl020003081>

96 Medallion (mid-fifteenth century), V&A Museum, London, <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O39776/medallion/>. For this paragraph, see G. F. Hill, "Medallic Portraits of Christ in the Fifteenth Century," *The Reliquary and Illustrated Archaeologist* 10 (1904): 178–84 (175–77).

97 *Portrait of Christ* (late fifteenth century), Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, [https://collections.ashmolean.org/collection/search/per\\_page/100/offset/100/sort\\_by/relevance/object/44457](https://collections.ashmolean.org/collection/search/per_page/100/offset/100/sort_by/relevance/object/44457) and plaquette (fifteenth century), British Museum, London, [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H\\_1893-0901-2](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1893-0901-2)

98 See Hill, "Medallic Portraits of Christ." For an example of Hill's "Type A," see medal (cast) (ca. 1492–1500), British Museum, London,

Images based on the Lentulus text appeared in a range of other media. This 1507 woodcut, made at Pforzheim, is gloriously spare (see Fig. 16.17).<sup>99</sup> The Augsburg printer Hans Burgkmair the Elder (1473–1531) made a ca. 1511–15 woodcut that paired the text of the Lentulus with an illustrative medal image, and an account of a bronze relief portrait based on a painted-from-life image that a sultan had given a German pilgrim visiting the Holy Sepulchre.<sup>100</sup> A painted Utrecht diptych (1490s) has the Lentulus text on the left and its image on the right (see Fig. 16.18).<sup>101</sup> Another Lentulus painting (ca. 1485–1509) bore an English caption.<sup>102</sup> Other Lentulus visualizations appeared as terracotta<sup>103</sup> or papier-mâché reliefs.<sup>104</sup>

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[https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/C\\_G3-PMAE1-1](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/C_G3-PMAE1-1). For Hall's "Type D," see the late-fifteenth to early-sixteenth century medals at the Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence, nr. 381763 and 381764, <https://fotoinventari.uffizi.it/it/ricerca>. Hill, "Medallic Portraits of Christ," 188–92, shares Nagel and Wood's doubts about the emerald.

- 99 Hill, "Medallic Portraits of Christ," 184–92.
- 100 Hans Burgkmair, *Portrait of Christ with the Text of the So-called Lentulus Letter*, ca. 1511, woodcut. See *Medaillon mit Profilkopf Christi* (1510–12), The Albertina Museum, Vienna, [https://sammlungenonline.albertina.at/?query=search=/record/objectnumbersearch=\[DG1934/52\]&showtype=record](https://sammlungenonline.albertina.at/?query=search=/record/objectnumbersearch=[DG1934/52]&showtype=record). This appears to derive from a Hill "Type D" medal. Max Geisberg, *German Single-Leaf Woodcut: 1500–1550*, ed. Walter L. Strauss, 4 vols. (New York: Hacker: 1974), II, 413 has a reproduction of a Burgkmair woodcut. See Georg Habich, "Zum Medaillen-Porträt Christi," *Archiv für Medaillen- und Plaketten-kunde* 2 (1920): 69–78; C. W. King, "The Emerald Vernicle of the Vatican," *Archaeological Journal* 27 (1870): 181–90; Stephanie Leitch, "Visual Acuity and the Physiognomer's Art of Observation," *Oxford Art Journal* 38 (2015): 189–208 (206–07), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxartj/kcv010>
- 101 *Diptych of Image of Christ* (fifteenth century), Museum Catharijneconvent, Utrecht, <https://www.nasscal.com/materiae-apocryphorum/diptych-of-image-of-christ/>. See John Oliver Hand, Catherine A. Metzger, and Ron Spronck, *Prayers and Portraits: Unfolding the Netherlandish Dyptich* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2006), 200–05; Stijn Bussels, "The Diptych of the Lentulus Letter: Building Textual and Visual Evidence for Christ's Appearance," in *Speaking to the Eye: Sight and Insight Through Text and Image (1150–1650)*, ed. Thérèse de Hemptinne, Veerle Fraeters, and Mariá Eugenia Góngora (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), 241–57; Finaldi, *The Image of Christ*, 94–97.
- 102 *The International Sale: Old Master Paintings, Drawings & Prints* (Exton, PA: Brilliant Studio, 2011), 10.
- 103 *Relief van Christushoofd* (1500–50), Stedelijk Museum Breda, Breda, <https://www.brabantserfgoed.nl/collectie/object/stedelijk-museum-breda/f5d1d515141f791df8b4f5bd38749e9248aa326c>
- 104 Horst Appuhn and Christian von Heusinger, "Der Fund kleiner Andachtsbilder des 13. bis 17. Jahrhunderts in Kloster Wienhausen," *Niederdeutsche Beiträge zur Kunstgeschichte* 4 (1965): 157–238 (230–31) (no. 88, ill. 212). The circumferential text reads "(IE-)SVS • XPS • SALVA/T(O)R • MV(N)DI."

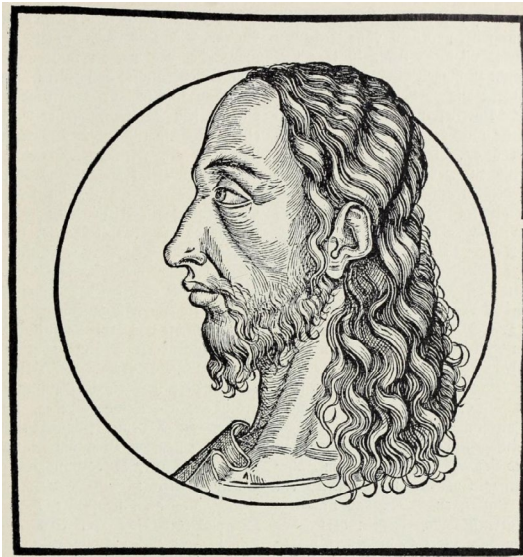


Fig. 16.17 Lentulus woodcut (1507), from Ludwig Kaemmerer, *Hubert und Jan van Eyck* (Leipzig: Velhagen and Klasing, 1898), 97, <https://archive.org/details/hubertundjanvane00kaem/page/96/mode/2up>



Fig. 16.18 Diptych of Image of Christ (1490s), Museum Catharijneconvent, Utrecht, Wikimedia, CC 0.0, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:MCC-42341\\_Tweeluik\\_met\\_Lentulusbrief\\_en\\_portret\\_van\\_Christus\\_\(1\).tif](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:MCC-42341_Tweeluik_met_Lentulusbrief_en_portret_van_Christus_(1).tif)

These Lentulus images found their way into other artwork. A Lentulus medal appears in Bartolomeo Montagna's (d. 1523) *Madonna and Child Enthroned with Saints*

(1498).<sup>105</sup> In other cases, the text or images exemplifying it informed the depiction of Jesus, as in the *Miraculous Draught of Fishes* tapestry (1516–21) (commissioned by Leo X for the Sistine Chapel; cartoon by Raphael; tapestries made in Brussels by Pieter van Aelst),<sup>106</sup> or Michelangelo's marble statue *Risen Christ* (1519–21).<sup>107</sup>

## Lifelike Jesus Images

In the wake of the development of the interest in authentic images came portraits that had no claim to authenticity but achieved a visual charisma through effective plain-ken techniques.

In some cases, the veil disappears, mostly or entirely, and we are left with Jesus portraits. Bernardino Zaganelli's (d. 1510) painting centres so starkly on such a plain veil that the face dominates, and it becomes a portrait of Jesus as much as an image of a veil. The hyper-realism of the face compounds this effect (see Fig. 16.19). Jan van Eyck (d. 1441) made a Veronica painting, now lost, that inspired a number of copies (ca. 1438–45) (see Fig. 16.20).<sup>108</sup> These portraits are signed works, with text explicitly commenting on the creation:

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- 105 Bartolomeo Montagna, *Madonna and Child Enthroned with Saints* (1498), Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan, Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bartolomeo\\_Montagna\\_-\\_Madonna\\_and\\_Child\\_Enthroned\\_with\\_Saints\\_-\\_WGA16154.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bartolomeo_Montagna_-_Madonna_and_Child_Enthroned_with_Saints_-_WGA16154.jpg)
- 106 Pieter van Aelst, *Miraculous Draught of Fishes* (ca. 1519), Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pieter\\_van\\_Edingen\\_Van\\_Aelst\\_-\\_The\\_Miraculous\\_Draught\\_of\\_Fishes\\_-\\_WGA07459.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pieter_van_Edingen_Van_Aelst_-_The_Miraculous_Draught_of_Fishes_-_WGA07459.jpg). Lisa Pon, "Raphael's *Acts of the Apostles* Tapestries for Leo X: Sight, Sound, and Space in the Sistine Chapel," *The Art Bulletin* 97 (2005): 388–408, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00043079.2015.1043827>; John Shearman, *Raphael's Cartoons in the Collection of Her Majesty the Queen and the Tapestries for the Sistine Chapel* (London: Phaidon, 1972), 50–51.
- 107 Michelangelo, *Risen Christ* (1519–21), Santa Maria sopra Minerva, Rome, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Michelangelo-Christ.jpg>. Wood, *Forgery, Replica, Fiction*, 162. Alexander Nagel, *The Controversy of Renaissance Art* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 138–39 links the Minerva Jesus to a similar image in Fra Bartolomeo's sketchbook. Fra Bartolomeo, *Studies for Salvator Mundi* (1516), Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, <https://www.boijmans.nl/collectie/kunstwerken/59387/schetsen-voor-diverse-projecten-waaronder-de-salvator-mundi-het-centrale-paneel-van-het-billi-altaarstuk-florence-galleria-palatina>
- 108 Extant copies include (1) *Antlitz Christi* (1438), Gemäldegalerie, Berlin, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Van\\_Eyck\\_%28workshop%29,\\_Holy\\_Face,\\_1438,\\_Berlin.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Van_Eyck_%28workshop%29,_Holy_Face,_1438,_Berlin.jpg), (2) *Salvator Mundi* (January 30, 1440), Groeningemuseum, Bruges, <https://artifexinopere.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/van-eyck-copie-salvator-mundi-Groeningemuseum-Bruges.jpg>, (3) Petrus Christus, *Head of Christ* (ca. 1445), Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/435897>, and (4) *Das Wahre Antlitz Christi* (ca. 1500), in the Alte Pinakothek, Munich, <https://www.sammlung.pinakothek.de/en/artwork/ZMLJYJDxJv>

“painted and completed me on 31 January 1438,” or a humble “as well as I can” (*als ich chan*).<sup>109</sup> Their illusionism orients towards the plain ken, with light making the nimbus look real. They appear like contemporary, secular portraits, sharing characteristics like half lengths and dark backgrounds.<sup>110</sup> The veil is no longer necessary to establish authenticity and power: these instead have illusionism to an impressive degree.



Fig. 16.19 Bernardino Zaganelli, *Saint Veronica's Veil* (ca. 1500), Philadelphia Museum of Art, public domain, <https://www.philamuseum.org/collection/object/101900>

109 This date is on the copy in the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Gemäldegalerie. See John Oliver Hand, “Salve sancta facies: Some Thoughts on the Iconography of the ‘Head of Christ’ by Petrus Christus,” *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 27 (1992): 7–18; Joseph Leo Koerner, *Moment of Self-Portraiture in German Renaissance Art* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 89, 104–07.

110 Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 430 notes that one (1440?) has windows reflected in his eyes, as if he’s sitting in a studio.





Fig. 16.20 Jan van Eyck workshop, *Holy Face* (ca. 1438), Gemäldegalerie, Berlin, Wikimedia, public domain, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Van\\_Eyck\\_%28workshop%29,\\_Holy\\_Face,\\_1438,\\_Berlin.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Van_Eyck_%28workshop%29,_Holy_Face,_1438,_Berlin.jpg)

Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528) also used himself as a model for Jesus, and perhaps Jesus as a model for himself.<sup>111</sup> His ca. 1492 self-portrait (see Fig. 16.21) has a pose and expression that reappears in his *Christ as Man of Sorrows* (1490s) (see Fig. 16.22). That *Christ* also shares with Dürer a distinctive, bony thumb. His 1500 *Self-Portrait*, now at Munich, has a symmetry and frontality that at the time would be strongly associated with religious, not secular, portraiture.<sup>112</sup> His 1503 charcoal drawing of the head of the dead Jesus again incorporates some of his own features; on it he notes that this was made during an illness.<sup>113</sup> In 1522, he made a new self-portrait, a pencil drawing with chalk, of himself in a state of

111 Giulia Bartrum, *Albrecht Dürer and his Legacy* (London: British Museum, 2002); Rudolf Preimesberger, "'...proprijs sic effingebam coloribus...': Zu Dürers Selbstbildnis von 1500," in *The Holy Face and the Paradox of Representation*, ed. Herbert L. Kessler (Bologna: Nuova Alfa, 1998); Koerner, *Moment*, 116; Robert Smith, "Dürer as Christ?," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 6 (1975): 26–36.

112 Bartrum, *Albrecht Dürer and his Legacy*, 81–82; Lorne Campbell, *Renaissance Portraits, European Portrait-Painting in the 14<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> Centuries* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1990), 81–86; Kayo Hiraoka, "The Man of Sorrows in the Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe," *Kyoto Studies in Art History* 1 (2016): 3–18, <https://doi.org/10.14989/229448>

113 Albrecht Dürer, drawing (1503), British Museum, London (BM Sloane 5218-29), [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P\\_SL-5218-29](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_SL-5218-29). See Smith, "Dürer as Christ?," 34–36.



suffering, when he had malaria; here he gives himself Jesus's features, and holds a whip and a scourge, like the Arma Christi.<sup>114</sup>



Fig. 16.21 Albrecht Dürer, *Self-Portrait* (1491–92), Graphische Sammlung der Universität, Erlangen, public domain, <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:bvb:29-bv039856508-8>.



Fig. 16.22 Albrecht Dürer, *Man of Sorrows* (1490s) Kunsthalle, Karlsruhe, CC0 1.0, <https://www.kunsthalle-karlsruhe.de/kunstwerke/Albrecht-Dürer/Christus-als-Schmerzmann/4CF6CD9D45DD6B1AC91CECAE9EC57F44/>

114 Albrecht Dürer, *Self-Portrait as the Man of Sorrows* (1522), Kunsthalle Bremen, Bremen, Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Albrecht\\_D%C3%BCrer\\_-\\_Self-Portrait\\_as\\_the\\_Man\\_of\\_Sorrows\\_-\\_WGA07108.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Albrecht_D%C3%BCrer_-_Self-Portrait_as_the_Man_of_Sorrows_-_WGA07108.jpg)

A number of paintings, through their artists' extraordinary skill, achieved a particularly compelling expressive force. Antonello da Messina's (d. 1479) *Christ Blessing* (1465) lacks a halo but includes a parapet with a card noting the artist's name and date.<sup>115</sup> Hans Memling's *Christ Blessing* (1478) is similarly illusionistic.<sup>116</sup> Benedetto Rusconi's (ca. 1460–1525) *Christ Blessing* (1510s) follows Antonello closely.<sup>117</sup> Francesco Francia's (1447–1517) *Ecce Homo* (ca. 1500) has an illusionistic Jesus with a translucent halo.<sup>118</sup> Antoniazzo Romano's version (ca. 1495) appears in the tradition of the Laon Veronica and the Roman-confraternal emblems.<sup>119</sup> Fernando Yáñez's (d. 1536) *Head of Christ* (ca. 1506) was influenced by Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519) (see Fig. 16.23). Correggio's (1489–1534) own *Head of Christ* (ca. 1525–30) uses a barely visible, awkwardly composed veil fringe, contributing to the realism of the depiction.<sup>120</sup>



Fig. 16.23 Fernando Yáñez, *Head of Christ* (ca. 1506), Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, public domain, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/641257>

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- 115 Antonello da Messina, *Christ Blessing* (1465), National Gallery, London, <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/antonello-da-messina-christ-blessing>
- 116 Hans Memling, *Christ Blessing* (1478), Norton Simon Museum, Pasadena, <https://www.nortonsimon.org/art/detail/M.1974.17.P>
- 117 Benedetto Rusconi, *Christ Blessing* (1510s), National Gallery London, <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/benedetto-diana-christ-blessing>
- 118 Francesco Francia, *Ecce Homo* (ca. 1500), The Monastery of the Minor Brothers, Dubrovnik, Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Francesco\\_francia,\\_ecce\\_homo,\\_1490-1510\\_ca.\\_01.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Francesco_francia,_ecce_homo,_1490-1510_ca._01.JPG)
- 119 Antoniazzo Romano, *Bust of Christ* (ca. 1495), Museo del Prado, Rome, <https://www.museodelprado.es/en/the-collection/art-work/bust-of-christ/5c550e3d-1b9d-4eb3-aebe-97372ac88807>

A branch of this lifelike-portrait tradition even reached Ethiopia: the painting known as the *Kwer'ata Re'esu* was probably made by a European, either brought to Ethiopia or created there, perhaps in connection with Dom Rodrigo de Lima's embassy in the 1520s.<sup>121</sup>

### Bloody Jesus Depictions

Lifelike Jesus images take many forms. While illusionistic Jesus portraits attract the modern gaze, depictions of the bloodied Jesus of the Passion narrative are, for us, much more alien.<sup>122</sup> We will see (Chapter 20) the violence associated with Jesus marriages in this period, and the gore in these images would also have been emotionally charged. One early-fifteenth-century Crucifixion describes Longinus's stabbing of Jesus as "love."<sup>123</sup>

These depictions occur in a variety of types, visual styles, media, and contexts. One illustration shows two angels holding the side wound, here embedded on

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- 120 Correggio, *Head of Christ* (ca. 1525–30), Getty Center, Los Angeles, Wikimedia, 94.PB.74 <https://www.getty.edu/art/collection/object/103RK3> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Correggio\\_\(Antonio\\_Allegri\)\\_\(Italian\)\\_-\\_Head\\_of\\_Christ\\_-\\_Google\\_Art\\_Project.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Correggio_(Antonio_Allegri)_(Italian)_-_Head_of_Christ_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg). David Ekserdjian, *Correggio* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP 1997), 6, 166–71 says this "evidently intended to be an image of the veil," but Denise Allen takes this as image of Jesus himself, with the veil wrapped around his shoulders, in Mollie Holtman, ed., *Masterpieces of the J. Paul Getty Museum: Paintings* (Los Angeles, CA: J. Paul Getty Museum, 1997), 25 (no. 10). Gustav Friedrich Waagen, *Galleries and Cabinets of Art in Great Britain* (London: Murray, 1857), 345 describes it as "unfinished." See Eugenio Riccomini, "Le Corrège: Un visage du Christ," *L'Oeil* 454 (1993): 26–29.
- 121 Martin Bailey, "Exclusive: First Colour Photographs Shed Fresh Light on Ethiopia's Most Treasured Icon and its Looting by an Agent of the British Museum," *The Art Newspaper* (25 September 2023), <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2023/09/25/exclusive-first-colour-photographs-shed-fresh-light-on-ethiopias-most-treasured-icon-and-its-looting-by-an-agent-of-the-british-museum>; Stanisław Chojnacki, *The "Kweráta re'esu": Its Iconography and Significance* (Naples: Istituto orientale di Napoli, 1985), fig. 4, 12–14.
- 122 For more on Jesus's wounds and their depictions, see David S. Areford, "Reception," *Studies in Iconography* 33 (2012): 73–88; David S. Areford, *The Viewer and the Printed Image in Late Medieval Europe* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 37–42; Parshall and Schoch, ed., *Origins of European Printmaking*, 258–62; Flora May Lewis, "The Wound in Christ's Side and the Instruments of the Passion," in *Women and the Book: Assessing the Visual Evidence*, ed. Jane H. M. Taylor and Lesley Smith (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 204–29; Wolfgang Riehle, *The Middle English Mystics*, trans. Bernard Standring (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), 46–47.
- 123 Nigel Morgan, "Longinus and the Wounded Heart," *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte* 46–47 (1993–94): 507–19.

a cloth.<sup>124</sup> Another abstracts the wounds even further, showing them floating in space independent of any wounded body.<sup>125</sup> A French stained glass has blood spurting out from wounds on Jesus's disembodied feet, hands, and heart.<sup>126</sup> One fifteenth-century manuscript illustration depicts a lance stabbing the heart, surrounded by nail-stabbed feet and hands.<sup>127</sup> Another manuscript image of the Crucifixion, linked to an 80,000-year indulgence, has Jesus's entire body dripping with blood, hideously.<sup>128</sup>

The most famous, and perhaps the bloodiest, of such manuscripts is BL Egerton MS 1821 (ca. 1480s).<sup>129</sup> An abbreviated "Jesus" heads each page, suggesting an origin in the House of Jesus of Bethlehem of Sheen, a Carthusian monastery outside London. Fol. 1r–2r have drops of blood, and in places are worn, suggesting rubbing if not kissing. Blood and wounds densely populate fol. 6r–8r. Turning another leaf, we see fol. 8v has a Man of Sorrows, covered with blood, with a background of blood. The next folios show a lanced heart on a cross with nailed hand and foot, covered with blood, on a background of blood

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- 124 Book of Hours (Cistercian), Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, MS W.218, fol. 28v, <https://www.thedigitalwalters.org/Data/WaltersManuscripts/html/W218/description.html>
- 125 Lofie Hours, Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, MS W.165, fol. 110v, <https://www.thedigitalwalters.org/Data/WaltersManuscripts/html/W165/description.html>
- 126 Sacred Heart and Five Wounds, stained glass (ca. 1450), Burrell Collection, Glasgow, <http://collections.glasgowmuseums.com/mwebcgi/mweb?request=record;id=39736;type=101#>. It has a cousin at in Shield with the Arma Christi, stained glass (ca. 1400), Burrell Collection, Glasgow, <http://collections.glasgowmuseums.com/mwebcgi/mweb?request=record;id=40991;type=101>
- 127 See *The Popular Imagery Collection: An Inventory of the Collection at the Harry Ransom Center*, University of Texas, Austin, <https://norman.hrc.utexas.edu/fasearch/findingAid.cfm?eadid=00484&kw=Jesus%20heart> (item 324).
- 128 Indulgence for 80,000 years (fifteenth century), Cambridge University Library, MS Add.5944/11, reproduced in Vibeke Olson, "Penetrating the Void: Picturing the Wound in Christ's Side as a Performative Space," in *Wounds and Wound Repair in Medieval Culture*, ed. Larissa Tracy and Kelly DeVries (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 313–39 (332), [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004306455\\_016](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004306455_016) and in Karen Ralph, "'Behold the Wounds on Christ': Crucifixion Imagery in Late Medieval Ireland," *Religions* 13 (2022): 570 (fig. 35), <http://dx.doi.org/10.3390/rel13060570>
- 129 BL Egerton MS 1821, [http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Egerton\\_MS\\_1821](http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Egerton_MS_1821) and [http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=egerton\\_ms\\_1821\\_fs001r](http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=egerton_ms_1821_fs001r). See Areford, *Viewer*, 76–80; Marlene Villalobos Hennessy, "The Social Life of a Manuscript Metaphor: Christ's Blood as Ink," in *The Social Life of Illumination: Manuscripts, Images, and Communities in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. Joyce Coleman, Mark Cruse, and Kathryn A. Smith (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), 17–52; John Lowden, "Treasures Known and Unknown in the British Library: Kissing Images (A Book for Devotion: BL MS Egerton 1821)," British Library Conference Centre (2–3 July 2007), <https://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/TourKnownC.asp>; Parshall and Schoch, ed., *Origins of European Printmaking*, 185–87.

(fol. 9r) and a resurrected Jesus covered with blood, on a bloody background (fol. 9v). One page has more than 500 wounds. The text on 8v offers 32,755 years' indulgence for saying ten prayers and a creed.

A number of woodcuts show the "Holy Heart" of Jesus.<sup>130</sup> Most link the heart to the Crucifixion,<sup>131</sup> but other themes occur, such as linking the stabbed heart to the Evangelists and the mass.<sup>132</sup> The most abstract is just a heart shape, but has been physically speared to create a slit.<sup>133</sup> Such images, called *Speerbilder*, were designed to be pierced by the Holy Lance, which would presumably transfer power from relic to image. Scholars debate how many were actually cut by the Lance itself.<sup>134</sup> One woodcut of Jesus's heart was impressed on vellum, and then the heart slit, presumably by the Lance (see Fig. 16.24). The best example was a coloured woodcut stitched into a book of pious texts and images as an additional leaf, which allowed it to be flipped around, where—without the image—one sees only the lance's wound, enhanced by the red paint that bled through. Text was added after the cut had been made, as the word *videamus* carefully splits around the wound. The text adapts 1 Corinthians 13:12, "for now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face," as a reference to the immediacy of the Last Judgment.<sup>135</sup>

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- 130 Lise de Greef, "Uterus Cordis: Speerbildchen Featuring the Christ Child in the Wounded Heart," *Jaarboek Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten Antwerpen* (2009): 52–97; Beatrice Hernad, *Die Graphiksammlung des Humanisten Hartmann Schedel* (Munich: Prestel, 1990), 177–79 (cat. 30–31); Carl Richstätter, *Die Herz-Jesu-Verehrung des deutschen Mittelalters* (Paderborn: Bonifacius, 1919).
- 131 Schwäbischer Meister, *Holy Heart Held by Angels* (ca. 1484–92), Albertine Museum, Vienna, [https://sammlungenonline.albertina.at/?query=search=/record/objectnumbersearch=\[DG1930/191\]&showtype=record](https://sammlungenonline.albertina.at/?query=search=/record/objectnumbersearch=[DG1930/191]&showtype=record)
- 132 *Holy Heart with Chalices and Four Evangelist Symbols* (ca. 1470s), Albertine Museum, Vienna, [https://sammlungenonline.albertina.at/?query=search=/record/objectnumbersearch=\[DG1930/193\]&showtype=record](https://sammlungenonline.albertina.at/?query=search=/record/objectnumbersearch=[DG1930/193]&showtype=record)
- 133 *Holy Heart* (before ca. 1470), Albertine Museum, Vienna, [https://sammlungenonline.albertina.at/?query=search=/record/objectnumbersearch=\[DG1930/192\]&showtype=record](https://sammlungenonline.albertina.at/?query=search=/record/objectnumbersearch=[DG1930/192]&showtype=record)
- 134 Areford, "Reception," 82–85; David S. Areford, "Multiplying the Sacred: The Fifteenth-Century Woodcut as Reproduction, Surrogate, Simulation," *Studies in the History of Art* 75 (2009): 141–47; Parshall and Schoch, ed., *Origins of European Printmaking*, 261; Volker Schier and Corine Schleif, "Seeing and Singing, Touching and Tasting the Holy Lance: The Power and Politics of Embodied Religious Experiences in Nuremberg, 1424–1524," in *Signs of Change: Transformations of Christian Traditions and their Representations in the Arts, 1000–2000*, ed. Nils Holger Petersen, Claus Clüver, and Nicolas Bell (New York: Brill, 2004), 401–26.
- 135 *Sacred Heart* (1460s), colored woodcut in *Hymni de confessoribus et de apostolis*, BSB Clm 692, fol. 73rv, <https://digitale-sammlungen.de/en/view/bsb00124327?page=150,151>. Colour reproduction at Areford, "Multiplying," 144–45.



Fig. 16.24 *Sacred Heart on a Cloth Held by an Angel* (ca. 1480s), Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, public domain, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/337750>

A number of bloody Jesus images include details about the wound measurements (see Chapter 8). A German woodcut of the wounds on the heart, feet, and hands has the major wound's slit precisely measured to correspond to the original wound. The inscription promises seven years' indulgence for looking upon it with reverence and contrition.<sup>136</sup> Two paintings juxtapose the Nuremberg Lance, drawn to scale, with a traditional Jesus scene.<sup>137</sup> One woodcut visualized the wound alongside a caption explaining that the cross within the wound measures one fortieth the height of Jesus; kissing it protects the kisser from bad luck and sudden death (see Fig. 16.25). The cross reproduced here should be rendered at 4.9 cm to be effectively kissable.

136 Woodcut with precisely measured side wound in heart, sidewounds on feet and hands (ca. 1484–92), BM 1880,0710.652, British Museum, London, [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P\\_1880-0710-652](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1880-0710-652). See Peter Schmidt, "Beschrieben, bemalt, zerschnitten: Tegernseer Mönche interpretieren einen Holzschnitt," in *Einblattdrucke des 15. und 16. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Volker Honemann, Sabine Griese, Falk Eisermann, and Marcus Ostermann (Tübingen: De Gruyter, 2000), 245–76 (260–61).

137 *Lamentation with Arma Christi*, central panel of an altarpiece (ca. 1424–50), oil on panel, Chapel of Saint George, Burg Trausnitz, Landshut, LaT.A 3; photograph by Bayerische Verwaltung der staatlichen Schlösser, Gärten und Seen, reproduced in Areford, "Multiplying," 135 (fig. 13). Areford describes a similar painting (ca. 1435), Jakobskapelle, Marienkirche, Danzig, published in Albert Bühler, "Die Heilige Lanze. Ein ikonographischer Beitrag zur Geschichte der deutschen Reichskleinodien," *Das Münster* 16 (1963): 85–116 (96–99).



Fig. 16.25 *Measure of the Side Wound and the Body of Christ* (ca. 1484–92), National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, public domain, <https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.4046.html>

## Envoi

Although we have seen disagreements about particular artistic techniques, especially those tending towards the plain ken, the people in these three visual-arts chapters generally had a positive attitude towards images overall. That esteem was not universal. In 1414, one Hussite entered a Prague church during a sermon, piously revering the crucifix until he was close enough to attack it with feces. This was not an isolated occurrence: the wave of such attacks seems to have been instigated by the reformer Jerome of Prague (1379–1416). In their iconoclasm, as in many other ways, the Bohemian reformers anticipated the Protestant Reformation of the following centuries.

Here, too, the Bohemian critics took up both kens to express their caution about, and sometimes outright hostility to, Jesus images. Much as the deep ken questioned whether illusionistic images accurately represented Jesus and his disciples, some of these reformers questioned whether any image of Jesus could truly represent him at all. Petr Chelčický (ca. 1390–1460) feared that what

appeared as a Jesus image might in fact be an image of the Antichrist. Nicholas of Dresden argued that all images were false, except for the law of God, the only true representation of divinity. Others with the plain ken framed their doubts in more human terms. Matthias of Janov warned that many images were merely the Church's tools for entrenching its wealth. Jakoubek of Stříbro (d. 1429) worried that images might distract from the true image of Jesus found in the Eucharist. They were a result of plain-ken human behavioural norms, not of deep-ken demands of scripture.<sup>138</sup> These reformers, like the Protestants to come, felt greater affinity for language, and for the precision and directness of not only the written but also the spoken word, the subject of the following chapters.

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138 *Magnum Oecumenicum Constantiense Concilium*, ed. Hermann von der Hardt, 6 vols. (Frankfurt: Genschii, 1699), IV, 640–41, 674–76. See Paul De Vooght, *Jacobellus de Stříbro* (Louvain: Publications universitaires, 1972), 142–49; Thomas Fudge, *Magnificent Ride: The First Reformation in Hussite Bohemia* (Florence: Routledge, 2018), 141, 178, 252, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315238531>; Noemi Rejchrtová, "Czech Utraquism at the Time of Václav Koranda the Younger and the Visual Arts," *Communio Viatorum* 20 (1977): 157–70 (159–60).





# SOUNDS



# 17. Language and Power

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Some of the upcoming paragraphs may feel digressive, and even transgressive. Parts of this chapter may read as though you are being led through the fifteenth century by a deranged and obsessive tour guide, pointing out *anything* bearing a Jesus-related name, and delighting in these namesakes' ubiquity and triviality, as well as in the series of anticlimaxes ("And on your left ... yet another Jesus!"). Readers might reasonably protest. The plain ken, after all, denies any real connection between Jesus and, say, a ship named Jesus. You might still find these excursions valuable as points of general interest, or as indications of the Jesus cult's superficial breadth and depth, or as opportunities to reflect on how fifteenth-century deep kens would have conceived these. An adventurous reader might even take up the deep ken when reading these passages: what if everything named Jesus really had some subtle, deep connection with Jesus himself?

The chapter begins with a general discussion of how the plain ken and the deep ken hear language. After looking at this analysis, applied to Jesus, we begin the tour of Jesus-named things, people, and places. The rest of the chapter considers the potential power of language in practice, which often depends on deep-ken connections. We first look at the cult that developed around the name "Jesus" and its IHS monogram, and finally zoom out to look out how people used language to supplicate Jesus through prayer and magic.

## Plain Ken

Jesus's original, Hebrew name was something like יֵשׁוּעַ Yeshua. From this, Syriac replicated it as ܝܫܘܥ Yeshua, and it appeared in Greek as Ἰησοῦς Iesous. From the latter, it entered Arabic as عيسى Isa, although some scholars hypothesize it arrived instead as a variation of the names Esau or Musa (Moses). In Spain, there appeared variants like *yasu* and *iča*, in Latin, *yce*.<sup>1</sup> Through this kind of

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1 Pedro de Alcalá, "El Credo," in *Arte para ligeramēte saber la lēgua arauiga* (Granada: Juan Varela de Salamanca, 1505), fol. 22v; L. P. Harvey, "A New Sacromonte

spreading through time and space, different languages came to have different forms of “Jesus.”

In 1400, there was great diversity even in English alone. As the letters I and J were still interchangeable, the most common name for him was Iesu or Jesu. Under the influence of Latin, sometimes—even a scholar like John Wycliffe (ca. 1328–84) was inconsistent—an S would be added when he was the subject of the sentence: Iesus, or Jesus, wept. In the sixteenth century, “Jesu” gave ground to “Jesus,” but long afterwards, especially in verse, “Jesu” would still make appearances in sentences where he possessed something (genitive case) or was being directly addressed (vocative case).

This is a messy, plain-ken history and, in its chaos, “Jesus” and related words might even lose their relationship with Jesus. “Christen” originally referred to baptism and to the general christianizing process. In our period, it seems to have become partially liberated from the ritual and religious context, and could refer to naming in general, its primary meaning today. The paternoster was so iconic a prayer that to “pater” served as a generic verb for praying, as when Geoffrey Chaucer (ca. 1340s–1400) uses the phrase “patre and prey.”<sup>2</sup> Jesus’s reference to a sore-covered beggar named Lazarus (Lk 16:20) yielded the Italian *lazzaro*, the French *ladre*, and by the fourteenth century the English “lazar” or “laser,” all meaning any poor, diseased man.<sup>3</sup> If an Italian in 1400 saw a *lazzaro* begging for alms, would he think of Jesus? Depending on the circumstances and his mood, he might, or might not.

The previous paragraphs are a plain-ken investigation of Jesus language. We can watch it spread geographically, and change through its users’ preferences. Popular cartoon father Homer Simpson once mistakenly referred to “Jebus,” which has now entered English slang.<sup>4</sup> If modern attempts to concretize language fail, Jesus-language fluidity could lead to future English speakers spelling his name, more phonetically and efficiently, as “Gzus.” None of the various spellings, from ancient Hebrew to imagined future spellers, have any particular deep meaning—they are all plain-ken accidents of history.

For the plain ken, the relationship between a word and the thing it names is—with few exceptions—accidental. This relationship has no necessary or

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Text?: Critical Notes,” *Revue de l’histoire des religions* 201 (1984): 421–25; Jingyi Ji, *Encounters Between Chinese Culture and Christianity: A Hermeneutical Perspective* (Berlin: Hopf, 2007), 39; Juan Pedro Monferrer Sala, “Algo más acerca de ‘Īsà, el nombre de Jesús en el Islam,” *Meah Seccion Arabe-Islam* 47 (1998): 399–404 (400).

2 Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Romaunt of the Rose*, ed. Charles Dahlberg (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 286 (line 6794).

3 Dan Michel, *Ayenbite of Inwoyt, or Remorse of Conscience*, trans. Richard Morris, ed. Pamela Gradon (London: Oxford UP, 1866), 189.

4 “Missionary: Impossible,” *The Simpsons*, season 11, episode 15 (20 February 2000).

powerful significance. If we decided to call books “cows” and cows “books,” beyond the consequent confusion, neither the books nor the cows themselves would be damaged. Words are merely convenient labels. This attitude towards language is common. William Shakespeare (d. 1616) in the 1590s had Juliet being a good plain-ken thinker by doubting the relationship between the word “rose” and the rose flower, which “by any other name would smell as sweet.” For Juliet, the flower existed before the accidental name.

## Deep Ken

Juliet’s rose echoed a question long debated in South Asia. Many scholars did think about Sanskrit in a deep-ken way, that its words were inherently, universally connected to the things that they described. The glorious mooing, milk-producing animal *gauḥ* गौः is necessarily called a *gauḥ* गौः, just as necessarily as  $2+2=4$ . Whether it could also be referenced with a dialect word like *gāvya* गाव्य was problematic. To refer to a *gauḥ* गौः as a “cow” (an etymological cousin) would be like saying  $2+2=4.1$ , or like children using made-up words understandable only to their parents—a rough approximation that might serve your needs, but is not technically correct. In seventeenth-century Varanasi, the grammarian Kamalākara Bhaṭṭa addressed this problem. If he knew the English word “cow”—his colleagues in India were debating whether the vernacular “Roman” language could bear meaning—he would have considered it at best a mere nickname. Kamalākara concluded that such slang terms lacked “the expressive power conferred by divine will, because these dialectal words have no stable form.” That is, they were merely temporal and fluid accidents of history. He doubted that a vernacular language could have any meaning at all, beyond what you might hear in a bell’s peal or a seashell’s soft roar. In Kamalākara’s teaching, real words—Sanskrit words—were “actually changeless and eternal.” This represented a long and widely held stance.<sup>5</sup> Most philosophers in the Indic Core could have explained to Juliet that a “rose,” in fact, stank in God’s nose compared to the sweetness of the *pāṭalam puṣpam* पाटलं पुष्पम्.

In the deep ken, language itself has power. A modern philosopher explained what he called *Wortrealismus* [verbal-realism]: “the pronunciation of a word is equally the firing of a loaded pistol.”<sup>6</sup> We can see this power in spells and in oaths. Some ordinary English verbs still possess that kind of power. Just by

5 Kamalākara, *Mīmāṃsākutūhalam*, quoted in *Forms of Knowledge in Early Modern Asia: Explorations of the Intellectual History of India and Tibet*, ed. Sheldon Pollock (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2011), 32, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv11cw6b7>

6 Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Einführung in die Phänomenologie der Religion*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Darmstadt: Gerd Mohn, 1961), 155–65.

saying “I promise to...” you will indeed promise to do something; what you said becomes true as you say it, unless you dispel the magic by manually signing quotation marks around “promise.” We may see that power with Yahweh. The Hebrew Bible records verbal efficacy: “Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light” (Gen. 1:3) or “By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth” (Ps 33:6). It is the spoken word itself that carries this power. The Hebrew Bible explains, “my word that goes out from my mouth [...] shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it” (Isaiah 55:11), and the Qur’an, more simply, “When He ordains a thing, He says only ‘Be’ and it is” (40:68). It may well be that Yahweh’s power to create is precisely the ability to speak commands perfectly.

This deep-ken understanding of language developed over time. At least from the time of Augustine (354–430), theologians held that the words of scripture were not ambivalent, but referred unambiguously to certain things. It is in fact those things that carry the ambivalent meanings. Thomas Aquinas (1225–74) wrote, “The author of Sacred Scripture is God, in whose power it is he prepares not only the word to signify (which a human can also do) but even the things themselves.” The twelfth century saw a quickening of interest in the *similitudines* [likenesses] or *ordines* [relationships] between these things. Relationships bound meaning-bearing objects into a comprehensive system that could be “read” by the wise, much like scripture.<sup>7</sup>

If the superficial form of words holds significance along with their deep meaning, then wordplay has real consequence. In the York Mystery Plays, Pilate explains his name is a compound reflecting the name of his mother, Pila, and his father, Atus.<sup>8</sup> Like for the Sanskrit linguists, this play found significance even in syllables of words. Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–94) noted that the six letters that make up the first word of the Torah (בְּרֵאשִׁית *bereshith*) can be used to make a Hebrew sentence, containing no letters beyond these six, that means “The father, in the Son and through the Son, the beginning and end or rest, created the head, the fire and the foundation of the great man with a good pact.”<sup>9</sup> This suggested, perhaps even proved, a profound connection between

7 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologica*, I, q. 1, art. 10; q. 44, art. 3; q. 47, art. 3. See Peter Harrison, *The Bible, Protestantism, and the Rise of Natural Science* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2001), 43–46; Dominique Poire, “Reading the Visible Universe: The Meaning of a Metaphor in the Work of Hugh of Saint-Victor,” *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 95 (2011): 363–82.

8 “The Dream of Pilate’s Wife,” in *York Mystery Plays*, ed. Richard Beadle and Pamela M. King (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984), 155.

9 Brian Ogren, “The Forty-Nine Gates of Wisdom as Forty-Nine Ways to Christ: Giovanni Pico della Mirandola’s Heptaplus and Nahmanidean Kabbalah,” *Rinascimento* 49 (2009): 27–43 (41).

the Hebrew Bible and Christian christology. Wycliffe might not have just been being playfully anti-clerical when he decoded “cardinal” as an acronym for “Captain of the Apostates of the Realm of the Devil, Impudent and Nefarious Ally of Lucifer.”<sup>10</sup>

In 1400, the plain ken might have attracted the interest of a few linguists, but what really mattered was the word “Jesus” understood with the deep ken. In that word itself lay the power to make oaths binding, and, we will see, to kill Ottomans. This is obviously not linked to the ethical teachings of the historical Jesus, who warned against taking oaths and killing. Any attempt to explain the killing power of “Jesus” in terms of deadly fear affecting fragile hearts reduces it to the plain-ken realm of human psychology. Instead, the deep ken saw power and meaning in the word “Jesus” itself, as it consonated with Jesus; the word and the god-man were connected, only an octave apart. Where the plain ken held the meaning of a word as accidental, the deep ken perceived its meaning hardwired into the fabric of the universe. We might also think of this as a kind of onomatopoeia, where sound and meaning converge.<sup>11</sup> One modern scholar describes language, understood thus, as “a creature from another world, but one with a literally monstrous influence on the world [...] not a mere tool, but a subject which could be mastered only by a chosen few, something objectively real that interacted with people as a magical entity.”<sup>12</sup>

## The Name beyond the Name Cult

We now shift from what Jesus was called to what was called Jesus. Jesus’s name appeared in many other places, beyond the obvious confines of its cult. Not everything named Jesus was linked with an attempt to kill a Turk. These more ordinary instances of “Jesus” might have no apparent meaning, which could imply anything from superficial decoration to hidden depths. They might have once had special meaning or power, perhaps eroded through centuries of use into a flat ubiquity. Merchants could initial a document with the YHS abbreviation.<sup>13</sup> Was this routine, or spiritual insurance? In this section we will consider a number of instances of “Jesus,” with some observations about the degree to which they likely participated in the deep-ken power described above.

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10 Anthony Kenny, *Wyclif* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985), 92.

11 Kristina Nelson, *The Art of Reciting the Quran* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2002), 13.

12 Navid Kermani, *God Is Beautiful: The Aesthetic Experience of the Quran* (Malden: Polity Press, 2014), 51–52.

13 Peter Burke, *The Italian Renaissance: Culture and Society in Italy*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2014), 191.



Unless you are a researcher conditioned over the last two decades to twitch whenever you read Jesus's name in a historical document, you might not realize that most references to him, and especially to "Christ," appear as a kind of decoration. A bishop might be described or addressed as "His Reverend Father in Christ." A judge might condemn a prisoner "in Christ's name," as Gilles de Rais (ca. 1405–40) was of heresy and sodomy.<sup>14</sup> "Salvation from Christ," "salvation in Christ," "farewell in Christ Jesus"—none of these expressions change meaning without "Jesus" or "Christ." In my elementary school we had to be friends with all our classmates, and so used "friends in Jesus's way" to achieve a minimal friendship with the unlikeable. The "in Jesus" in these fifteenth-century phrases neither added nor subtracted substantial meaning, although they might add intensification or nuance—at least, that is the appearance. Is it not more likely that a "friend in Christ" is not something less than a friend, as it was in my youth, but something more, a relationship supported by Jesus?

A special case of these potentially powerful references involve Jesus's "bowels," a word which in our period referred not specifically to the digestive tract, but to the body's insides, and metaphorically to the mercy that welled up from within.<sup>15</sup> The concept perhaps came from Philippians 1:8, where Paul longs for his audience in the innards (σπλαγχνος) of Jesus. The Wycliffite Bible translated these as "bowels": "How I covet you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ." Drawing on this same verse, Jan Hus (ca. 1370–1415) could "exhort" his audience "by the bowels of Jesus Christ," or send a correspondent "greetings or whatever sweeter from bowels of Jesus Christ."<sup>16</sup> In July 1415, Henry V (1386–1422) wrote to Charles VI (1368–1422) one last time, from Southampton while watching his *Jesus* ship (see below) being built, to ask him "in the name of the merciful bowels of Jesus Christ to do us justice."<sup>17</sup> Soon "bowels" in such contexts would be replaced by the "heart," "bosom," or "breast" of Jesus, without clear change in meaning, although the old sense sometimes endured.<sup>18</sup>

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14 Reginald Hyatte, ed., *Laughter for the Devil: The Trials of Gilles de Rais, Companion-in-arms of Joan of Arc (1440)* (Ontario: Associated University Presses, 1984), 42–43, 124–25.

15 Nicholas Love wrote that at Pentecost the disciples' "bowels filled with the holy ghost." See Nicholas Love, *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ: A Reading Text*, ed. Michael G. Sargent (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2004), 153.

16 Jan Hus, *The Letters of John Hus*, trans. Matthew Spinka (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1972), 178–79, 194, 213.

17 George Makepeace Towle, *The History of Henry the Fifth* (New York: Appleton, 1866), 290.

18 *The Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine* 1 (London: J. Whittle, 1798), 328 proclaimed, "In the name of God then, I request you to shoot all Atheists; in the bowels of Jesus Christ I beseech you to run your bayonets in the guts of those monsters that deny the Lord who bought them..."

## Names for Jesus

Jesus was also referred to by words or phrases beyond his personal name, words that had their own potential power to protect. We can capture part of this contemporary interest by looking at collections of titles. The fifteenth-century Varese Book of Hours included a list of titles of Jesus, below. Though extensive, even this was not a complete list, as other manuscripts from the same place and time had their own lists that only partially overlapped with this one. A late-fifteenth-century amulet roll from France had its own list, with fourteen unique names, and twenty-seven shared with the Varese Book of Hours, which had an additional forty-seven names unknown to the amulet. Such lists drew from traditions that went back centuries.<sup>19</sup> Carrying a list of Jesus's names as a protective device was common enough in early-fifteenth-century England to attract the disapproval of William Tyndale (ca. 1494–1536).<sup>20</sup>

The Varese list runs as follows:

| NAME                  |                | NAME            |          | NAME              |              |
|-----------------------|----------------|-----------------|----------|-------------------|--------------|
| <i>Trinitas</i>       | trinity        | <i>mediator</i> | mediator | <i>rex</i>        | king         |
| <i>hon</i>            | the one being  | <i>agnus</i>    | lamb     | <i>flos</i>       | flower       |
| <i>agios</i>          | holy           | <i>ovis</i>     | sheep    | <i>sanctus</i>    | holy         |
| <i>o theos</i>        | God            | <i>vitulus</i>  | cow      | <i>immortalis</i> | immoral      |
| <i>mesias</i>         | messiah        | <i>aries</i>    | ram      | <i>Christus</i>   | Christ       |
| <i>sabaoth</i>        | armies         | <i>leo</i>      | lion     | <i>Ihesus</i>     | Jesus        |
| <i>emanuel</i>        | God is with us | <i>serpens</i>  | serpent  | <i>pater</i>      | father       |
| <i>adonay</i>         | lord           | <i>geos</i>     | earth    | <i>filius</i>     | son          |
| <i>athanatos</i>      | immortal       | <i>os</i>       | bone     | <i>hominis</i>    | man          |
| <i>theos</i>          | god            | <i>vermis</i>   | worm     | <i>Spiritus</i>   | holy         |
| <i>tetragrammaton</i> | name of God    | <i>verbum</i>   | word     | <i>Sanctus</i>    | spirit       |
| <i>ysion</i>          | substance      | <i>ymago</i>    | image    | <i>omnipotens</i> | all-powerful |

- 19 Nadia Carrisi, "I nomi di cristo e di Maria in un libro d'ore quattrocentesco di Varese," *Aevum* 80 (2006): 529–50. See Rosanne Hebing, "Allmygti god this lettry sent': English Heavenly Letter Charms in Late Medieval Books and Rolls," *Studies in Philology* 114 (2017): 720–47 (740–45), <https://doi.org/10.1353/sip.2017.0027>; D. C. Skemer, "Amulet Rolls and Female Devotion in the late Middle Ages," *Scriptorium* 55 (2001): 197–227. For more lists of names and titles, see Alphonse Aymar, "Le sachet accoucheur et ses mystères," *Annales du Midi* 38 (1926): 273–347 (325); BodL MS Bodl. 850, fol. 93v–94r.
- 20 William Tyndale, *An Answer to Sir Thomas More's Dialogue*, ed. Henry Walter (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1850), 61.

|                        |                     |                 |           |                     |               |
|------------------------|---------------------|-----------------|-----------|---------------------|---------------|
| <i>eli</i>             | my god              | <i>lux</i>      | light     | <i>misericors</i>   | merciful      |
| <i>leison</i>          | have mercy          | <i>splendor</i> | splendour | <i>caritas</i>      | love          |
| <i>salvator</i>        | saviour             | <i>panis</i>    | bread     | <i>eternus</i>      | eternal       |
| <i>primogenitus</i>    | first born          | <i>mons</i>     | mountain  | <i>creator</i>      | creator       |
| <i>principium</i>      | beginning           | <i>vitis</i>    | vine      | <i>redemptor</i>    | redemptor     |
| <i>finis</i>           | end                 | <i>lapis</i>    | stone     | <i>primus</i>       | first         |
| <i>via</i>             | way                 | <i>petra</i>    | rock      | <i>novissimus</i>   | newest        |
| <i>veritas</i>         | truth               | <i>angelus</i>  | angel     | <i>bonitas</i>      | goodness      |
| <i>vita</i>            | life                | <i>sponsus</i>  | groom     | <i>summum bonum</i> | greatest good |
| <i>sapientia</i>       | wisdom              | <i>pater</i>    | father    | <i>eli</i>          | my god        |
| <i>virtus</i>          | virtue              | <i>sacerdos</i> | priest    | <i>alleluya</i>     | praise god    |
| <i>paracletus</i>      | paraclete, advocate | <i>propheta</i> | prophet   | <i>alpha</i>        | alpha         |
| <i>ego sum qui sum</i> | I am who I am       | <i>ianua</i>    | gate      |                     |               |

Table 17.1 Jesus Names in the Varese Book of Hours.

The terms in this list are impressive for their diversity. They come from three languages, Greek, Hebrew, and Latin. Two dozen come from the Old Testament, and about half as many from the New. That so many predate Jesus's human birth demonstrates a deep-ken, out of time, understanding. Over a dozen come from the liturgy. Some have no obvious origin. This is not an academic list listed for the joy of listing. After each word comes the sign of the cross, indicating that the supplicant should physically make that sign between or during words, or perhaps as an additional empowerment of the written text itself. Some phrases are broken up: "Spiritus Sanctus" is two items, and "via, veritas, vita" is three, which again implies that the words themselves are as important as their meaning. The list concludes, "Have mercy on me, a sinner, because you have suffered for me."

## Jesus Namesakes

The most awesome Jesus namesakes of the period were powerful indeed. The largest "Jesus" shot iron darts. This was the two-masted, 1,000-ton ship *Jesus of the Tower*, which Henry V, ca. 1415, watched being built at the Southampton shipyard; only one contemporary English vessel was larger. A single anchor of this *Jesus* weighed 2,224 lbs. This was a mighty warship intended to defy the Genoese ships hired by France. In fact, the *Jesus* rushed not into battle, but into retirement. In 1420, its crew refused to serve as part of the coastal defence, and,

by 1432, she was indefinitely docked in the Southampton mudflats, without rigging, maintenance, or hope. A tender-follower of the big *Jesus* was called the *Little Jesus*, still active into the 1430s. This was a ship named not after the person “Jesus” and then cut in half with the “little,” but rather after the powerful ship named after Jesus himself. A similar retirement had previously overtaken the English galley *Jesus Maria*, sold in 1417, and eventually left to rot, as the new balingers and barges rendered galleys obsolete for coastal defence.<sup>21</sup> The pairing of the powerful Jesus name with the physically powerful huge tonnage and dart-shooting indicates that the name could indeed have been meant for the deep ken.

Context, not weapons, is a clue for a deep-ken orientation in the case of Vasco da Gama’s (ca. 1469–1524) flagship, the *São Gabriel*. The angel Gabriel had announced news of the Incarnation of Jesus to Mary, just as the *São Gabriel*, sailing for King Manuel, announced the same news fifteen centuries later to South Asia as part of the Christian missionary expansion.<sup>22</sup>

Following those vessels beyond the horizon, we also find “Jesus” attached to several religious orders with wide geographical visions. In 1319, the pope and the Portuguese king collaborated to establish the *Ordem dos Cavaleiros de Cristo* [Order of the Knights of Christ] on the remains of the Portugal branch of the Knights Templar, dissolved seven years earlier. Two African diplomats, Don Pedro de Sousa of Kongo and Giacomo of Ethiopia, both became knights in this Order of Christ in the 1510s.<sup>23</sup> In 1366, Philippe de Mézières (ca. 1327–1405), the Chancellor of Cyprus and tutor to French king Charles VI, drew up a plan for the Order of the Passion of Jesus Christ. Its rule emphasized a constant meditation on the Passion, on suffering and love, which inspired a desire to take back Jerusalem: “Our holy Knighthood’s penance will thus be to keep compassionate memory of our Lord’s Passion fresh in its heart.”<sup>24</sup> Its banner featured a gold

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- 21 Susan Rose, *Medieval Naval Warfare, 1000–1500* (London: Routledge, 2005), 70, 86, 88; B. Carpenter-Turner, “The ‘Little Jesus of the Tower,’ a Bursledon Ship of the Early Fifteenth Century,” *Proceedings of the Hampshire Field Club & Archaeological Society* 17 (1951): 173–78; *The Navy of the Lancastrian Kings: Accounts and Inventories of William Soper*, ed. Susan Rose (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1982), 102–05, 120–30.
- 22 Annemarie Jordan Gschwend, *The Global City: On the Streets of Renaissance Lisbon* (London: Paul Holberton, 2015), 96.
- 23 Kate Lowe, “‘Representing’ Africa: Ambassadors and Princes from Christian Africa to Renaissance Italy and Portugal: 1402–1608,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 17 (2007): 101–28.
- 24 Philippe de Mézières, “La sustance de la Passion de Jhesus Crist” (ca. 1390), in BodL MS Ashmole 813, fol. 7r. See Margaret Burland, David LaGuardia and Andrea Tarnowski, ed., *Meaning and Its Objects: Material Culture in Medieval and Renaissance France* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2006); Aziz Suryal Atiya, *The Crusade*

lamb on a red cross on a black field. Both of these Jesus-namesake orders connected to worldly power: the first was an important tool for diplomacy, and the latter for crusade. Even in the latter case the focus on suffering and love was transformed through fourteenth-century logic into a support for war.

Deep-ken resonance is less likely when a religious order's name was not chosen, but imposed by outsiders. In 1360, at Siena, Giovanni Colombini (ca. 1304–67) established the Apostolic Clerics of Saint Jerome. As those clerics habitually bookended their sermons with screams of "Jesus," their audiences, and perhaps suspicious critics, dubbed them the Jesuati or Gesuati. In 1367, they received papal approval. Their colloquial name endured even after their official title was confirmed in 1499. Their sister order was the Poor Jesuatesses of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. (In the sixteenth century, the more famous Company of Jesus ("Jesuits") formed, and the Gesuati dissolved in 1668, but the Jesuatesses endured throughout our period.) In 1419, the Canonici Regolari S. Salvatoris [Canons Regular of the Holy Saviour] were re-established in Bologna.<sup>25</sup> Neither the Canonici Regolari nor the Jesuatesses were named directly after Jesus; the former was named after the Santissimo Salvatore Church in Bologna, and the latter after the Jesuati. The additional step between their names and Jesus perhaps makes the deep ken less likely.

### *Muslims Named Jesus*

As our period opens, the Balkans and Anatolia in particular swarmed with prominent, and sometimes powerful, men named Jesus. Let us survey the situation as the fourteenth century concluded, between the conquests of Emir Timur (1336–1405) and of the Ottomans.

"Jesus," in the form "Isa," was popular as a name for Muslim rulers. Isa Bey I (rl. 1360–90) ruled Aydin, until it fell in 1390 to the Ottomans under Sultan Bayezid I (ca. 1360–1403), who would marry Isa Bey's daughter Hafsa. The mosque Isa Bey built in 1375, using columns from the ruins of Ephesus, preserved the fame of his name long after his death.<sup>26</sup>

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*of Nicopolis* (London: Methuen, 1934), 26–27, 123, with the charter at 136–38; J. J. N. Palmer, *England, France and Christendom, 1377–99* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), 186; Andrea Tarnowski, "Material Examples: Philippe de Mézières' Order of the Passion," *Yale French Studies* 110 (2006): 163–67.

25 Francis X. Blouin, *Vatican Archives: An Inventory and Guide to Historical Documents of the Holy See* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997), 7.7.2, 7.7.10, 7.7.10.1.

26 Clive Foss, *Ephesus after Antiquity: A Late Antique, Byzantine and Turkish City* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2010); Paul Lemerle, *L'Emirat d'Aydin, Byzance et l'Occident: Recherches sur 'La geste d'Umur Pacha* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1957); Nevra Necipoğlu, *Byzantium between the Ottomans and the Latins*

When Bayezid conquered Aydin, his own son “Jesus” (Isa) was only ten years old. At the 1402 Battle of Ankara, Timur captured, and perhaps caged, Bayezid, but Jesus and his brothers escaped. After the Timurid tide withdrew, Jesus established himself at Bursa as a ruler of Greece and western Anatolia. The 1404 death of Bayezid brought misfortune to Jesus. Attended by only a handful of light cavalry, he was being hunted down by the forces of his brother Moses. Muhammad, the youngest brother, invaded, and Jesus fled west to ally with a third brother, Solomon, who had set himself up at Adrianople. That refuge was short lived, for Moses, who had been sent by Muhammad, bested Solomon in 1410. Jesus, probably sharing the downfall, disappeared from the historical record. Moses’s victory gave him Bulgaria, and Muhammad had to defeat him in turn, thus ending the war between the prophets’ namesakes.<sup>27</sup>

Bayezid’s star general Evrenos Bey (d. 1417), who fought at Kosovo and Nicopolis, was both the son and the father of an Isa. The Ottoman general Isa Bey Ishaković (fl. 1439–70), founder of Sarajevo, governed Bosnia in the 1450s and 1460s, where the Gazi Isa-Bey Madrasa was built and named after him. He left memorial funds to build the mosque that bears his name in Skopje (1475–76).<sup>28</sup> Yet another Isa Bey governed the Morea in the 1460s.

To the east of the Ottomans, the Artuqid Sultan Majd al-Din Isa al-Zahir (1376–1406) ruled Mardin, before Timur took it in 1394. There, too, a madrasa

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(Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2012), 9; Katharina Otto-Dorn, “Die Isa Bey Moschee in Ephesus,” *Istanbul Forschungen* 17 (1950): 115–31; Elizabeth A. Zachariadou, *Trade and Crusade: Venetian Crete and the Emirates of Menteshe and Aydin (1300–1415)* (Venice: Istituto Ellenico di Studi Bizantini e Postbizantini, 1983).

- 27 Stanford J. Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2010), 37–78. Some scholars have suggested that Isa’s name is a deviation from Islam towards Christianity. There is no evidence for this: Isa is central to Islam, although the sultan’s Christian wife Olivera Despina may well have moderated his policies.
- 28 Vasilis Demetriades, “The Tomb of Ghāzī Evrenos Bey at Yenitsa and Its Inscription,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 39 (1976): 328–32 (332), <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0041977x00050023>; Ahmed Kulanić, “Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sufi Orders in,” in *Oxford Islamic Studies Online* (2022), <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780197669419.001.0001/acref-9780197669419-e-53?rskey=V13fsZ&result=1>; Ali Nihat Kundak, “The Architectural Development of Skopje (Uskup) and the Decoration of Monuments during the Ottoman Era,” in *Turkey, Looking Behind and Before*, ed. William H. Taylor (London: AGP, 2016), 100–01; Heath Lowry, *The Nature of the Early Ottoman State* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2003), 61, <https://doi.org/10.1353/book4635>; I. Mélikoff, “Evrenos Oghullari,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. Alexander P. Kazhdan, II 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 12 vols. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991), II, 720; Mehmed Mujezinović, “Musafirhana i tekija Isa-bega Ishakovića u Sarajevu,” *Naše starine* 3 (1966): 245–52.

was named after him, and thus bore Jesus's name as well. The last Artuqis' archenemy, the Aq Qoyunlu leader Qara Usman (1356–1435) had a great-grandson Uzun Hasan (1423–78) whose brother-in-law was an Isa, son of the Dowlat Shah of the Kurdish Bulduqani. Uzun Hasan's own son Ya'qub (d. ca. 1490) relied on the *qadi* (judge) Isa Savaji (d. 1491) to implement his centralizing land-reform policies. The 1390s had also seen a *qadi* named Sharaf al-Din Isa, the chief Shafi'ite judge in Jerusalem.<sup>29</sup>

That these Isa names held real meaning, and were not merely superficial names, can be seen in the case of the Ottoman poet Isa of Prishtina (d. ca. 1512). Of Albanian background, as a young man he moved to Istanbul, and soon acquired a reputation as a calligrapher and as secretary to the grand vizier. His verse was illustrative of contemporary court poetry, pointing towards wine, potable or metaphorical, as a way to transcend the material world (see Chapter 20). The penname he adopted as a poet followed logically from his given name, and suggests its importance to him: "Mesihî," the messiah. This Jesus identity only compounded after his death. The later poet Aşık Çelebi (d. 1571) proclaimed that the actual messiah, Jesus, had sent the poet messiah, Isa, to use his healing Messiah-breath to rejuvenate poetry.<sup>30</sup>

### Christians Named Jesus

On the Christian side, in contrast, we see no one named Jesus as such. We are still centuries away from Jesús being a popular Spanish name.<sup>31</sup> Instead, we

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- 29 Sheila Blair, *Islamic Calligraphy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2008), 327–28, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781474464475>; V. Minorsky, "The Aq-Qoyunlu and Land Reforms," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 17 (1955): 451–58; John E. Woods, *The Aqquyunlu: Clan, Confederation, Empire* (Salt Lake City, UT: University of Utah Press, 1999), 45–57, 105, 200–01.
- 30 Aşık Çelebi, *Meşâirü'ş-Şuarâ*, in Istanbul, Süleymaniye Yazma Eser Kütüphanesi, Süleymaniye No. 268, fol. 166a–67b. See Mine Mengi, "The Fifteenth Century Ottoman Poet Mesihî and his Work," *Erdem* 5 (1986): 357–72 (357).
- 31 Contemporary Spanish Jesus-related names were Cristobal, Manuel, and Salvador. For example, see María Jesús Sanz Serrano, *El gremio de plateros sevillano: 1344–1867* (Sevilla: Secretariado de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Sevilla, 1991); Cristóbal Bermúdez Plata, *Catálogo de Pasajeros a Indias Durante los Siglos XVI, XVII, y XVIII*, 3 vols. (Seville: Imprenta de la Gavidia, 1946), III; Câmara Municipal, *Livro do lançamento e serviço que a Cidade de Lisboa fez a ed Rei Nosso Senhor no ano de 1565; documentos para a historia da Cidade de Lisboa* (Lisbon: Câmara Municipal, 1947–48); Luis Romera Iruela and Maria del Carmen Galbis Díez, *Catálogo de Pasajeros a Indias, Siglos XVI, XVII, y XVIII* (Seville: Archivo General de Indias, 1980); Louis Coronas Tejada, *Conversos and Inquisition in Jaén*, trans. Stephanie Nakache (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 1988); Antonio de la Torre and E. A. de la Torre, ed., *Cuentas de Gonzalo de Baeza Tesorero de Isabel*

mostly find Manuels. The Bible explains the name: Isaiah 7 includes a prophecy to King Ahaz during the eighth-century-BC Syro-Ephraimite War that a virgin would bear a son named Emmanuel. Mt 1:23 applies this prophecy to Jesus: “Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.”

Who were these Manuels nominally linked to Jesus? We find many in the rump state of the Roman Empire, renamed Byzantium by modern historians. At this time, the Roman Empire was essentially reduced to its beleaguered capital Constantinople, the nearby north coast of the Marmora Sea, the second city Thessalonica, and least precariously the Morea in the Peloponnese.

Manuel was a common name among the middling, and, perhaps, lower classes of Byzantine society, so most of them likely eluded the historical record. A handful of Manuels were at the highest social ranks.

The most important Manuel was the emperor, Manuel II Palaiologos (1350–1425). At the beginning of his reign, he might be excused for thinking his realm existed only for his humiliation. In 1390, Manuel joined Bayezid fighting against Philadelphia/Alaşehir, the last city in Anatolia to fall to the Ottomans. To fund his defence, Manuel II reached out to Venice in 1395 for a new loan, offering Jesus’s clothing as collateral. That Serene Republic declined the offer, presumably unimpressed by the likelihood of repayment, but explicitly pointing to the potential for popular outrage at the loss of the holy relic.<sup>32</sup>

Soon after taking Philadelphia for the Ottomans, Manuel became Emperor. Three months after his ascension to the throne, he accepted Bayezid’s bidding to go on campaign again. He passed the winter of 1391–92 in Ankara, discussing theology with a Muslim expert, who praised Muhammad as a happy-medium

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*la Catolica* (Madrid: Biblioteca Reyes Catolicos, 1956); Sara L. Uckelman, “Late-Period Spanish Men’s Names from Seville” (2006), <http://www.ellipsis.cx/~liana/names/spanish/silversmiths.html>; Aryanhwy merch Catmael (Sara L. Uckelman), “Portuguese Masculine Names from Lisbon, 1565,” (2004), <http://www.ellipsis.cx/~liana/names/portuguese/masc1565.html>; Elsbeth Anne Roth (Kathy Van Stone), “16<sup>th</sup> Century Spanish Names,” (2002), <http://www.cs.cmu.edu/~kvs/heraldry/spanish16/>; Sara L. Uckelman, “Spanish Names from Jaén, 1495,” (2006), <http://www.ellipsis.cx/~liana/names/spanish/jaen1495.html>; Juliana de Luna (Julia Smith), “Spanish Names from the Late 15<sup>th</sup> Century,” (1999–2000), <https://www.s-gabriel.org/names/juliana/isabella/MensGivenFreq.html>

32 Manuel II Palaiologos, “Letter of Feb. 17, 1396,” in “Official Documents of Manuel II Palaeologus,” trans. George Dennis, *Byzantion* 41 (1971): 45–58 (46–47); Freddy Thiriet, *Régestes des délibérations du Sénat de Venise concernant la Roumanie*, 3 vols. (Paris: La Haye: Mouton, 1958), I, 210 (no. 892, 896). See Enrico Cornet, *Le guerre dei Veneti nell’Asia 1470–1474* (Vienna: Tandler, 1856), 17; Nicolae Iorga, “Originea legăturilor cu Ștefan cel Mare și mediul politic al dezvoltării lor,” in *Veneția în Marea Neagră*, *Analele Academiei Romane* 37, 3 vols. (Bucharest: Academia Romana, 1914), III, 3.



lawgiver between strict Moses and easy-going Jesus, and explained that just as the Jews had suffered for rejecting Jesus, so too the Christians were then suffering for rejecting Muhammad. The Emperor sniffed that Jesus had promised his followers that suffering, which thus had no additional significance.<sup>33</sup>

The Emperor was not the only Manuel. His uncle Manuel Kantakouzenos (ca. 1326–80) had been Despot of the Morea. His first cousin once removed, Manuel III Megas Komnenos (1364–1417) was Emperor of Trebizond, and gave a piece of the True Cross to the Soumela Monastery. The Emperor also had a wealthy cousin named Manuel Philanthropenos, father-in-law to the Manuel ruling Trebizond. Manuel Deblitzenos and his wife Maria of the landowning elite in Thessalonica had their estate occupied by the Serbs, and around 1376 recovered it from them. Serbian and Ottoman aggression on either side made it as difficult to farm as it was to fob off on new buyers. Manuel ended up selling his lands to a monastery on Mount Athos in exchange for three annuities, which were sometimes paid. The monastery was able to manage the lands in relative peace throughout the Ottoman rule. Vamek Dadiani (d. 1396), the Prince of Samegrelo, invited a painter named Manuel Eugenicos from Constantinople to do the murals at Tsalenjkhka in Georgia.<sup>34</sup>

Jesus appeared more directly in Ethiopian names. Sarwe Iyasus ሣርወ ኢየሱስ [Army of Jesus] ruled Ethiopia in 1433. His brother Amda Iyasus ዐዋደ ኢየሱስ [Pillar of Jesus] succeed him and ruled into 1434. The former was also called ሥርወ ኢየሱስ, meaning “Root” or “Dynasty” of Jesus. Later in the century, officials such as Mahari Krestos መርሃ ክርስቶስ [Plan of Christ] and Gabra Iyasus ገብረ ኢየሱስ [Servant of Jesus] fought to defend the dynasty.<sup>35</sup>

Other places in the Far West had men of more modest backgrounds that bore Jesus-related names. The Dutch painter Petrus Christus (ca. 1415–76) and his father, also Petrus Christus, shared a last name that the deep ken might

33 Stephen W. Reinert, “Manuel II Palaeologos and his Müderris,” in *The Twilight of Byzantium: Political, Spiritual, and Cultural Life in Byzantium during the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries*, ed. Slobodan Ćurčić and Doula Mouriki (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2019), 39–51, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780691198040-009>; C. J. G. Turner, “Pages from the Late Byzantine Philosophy of History,” *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 57 (1964): 346–73 (349–50).

34 Инга Лордкипанидзе, *Роспись в Цаленджиха* (Tbilisi: Metsniereba, 1992); Alicia Bank, “L’art byzantin dans les collections de l’Union Soviétique,” *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale* 20 (1977): 301–06 (306); Nevra Necipoğlu, *Byzantium between the Ottomans and the Latins* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2009), 57–58, 92, 178.

35 *Les chroniques de Zar’a Yâ’eqôb et de Ba’eda Mâryâm*, ed. Jules Perruchon (Paris: Bouillon, 1893), xx, xxv, 206; Alberto Elli, *Storia della Chiesa Ortodossa Tawâhedo d’Etiopia*, 2 vols. (Milan: Terra Santa, 2017), I, 375.

have connected to their fame as painters of Jesus.<sup>36</sup> At least two Gaels around 1450 bore the name Giolla Críost, meaning the man or servant of Christ. There was a Giolla Críost Táilliúr as well as a bard named Giolla Críost Brúilingeach.<sup>37</sup> “Táilliúr” suggests a professional tailor, and “Brúilingeach” could mean “crucified,” “bridegroom,” or “brutal,” or refer to the loose, courtly meter or poetic tradition known as “brúilingeacht.” In Italy, we find another group with Jesus-related names, the Galileo family. Galileo Bonaiuti (ca. 1370–1450) was a doctor, professor, and civic leader in Florence. Links between Galileo and Galilee, the region in northern Israel where Jesus spent most of his earthly life, were re-emphasized when he fashionably took his given name as a new surname, becoming Galileo Galilei (“Galilaeus de Galilaeis”). His great-great-great-great-grandnephew was the celebrated astronomer.<sup>38</sup>

These names were chosen purposefully, usually given by a member of one generation to a member of the next. They thus create genealogies of Jesus names. A given Jesus, or Manuel, might associate his name in part with a family member he was named after, to a lesser degree with a family member after whom *that* family member had been named, and to an unknown degree with Jesus himself. Circumstances were more likely than names to bring meekness to a Byzantine Manuel, or greatness to an Ottoman Isa.

One asymmetry stretches across the subcults. Muslims were named “Jesus,” specifically, but no Christians. This reflects in part Christian caution about misuse of his name, as in the concern opponents showed for the audacity of the Jesus name cult. It also reflects an asymmetry in the two subcults’ texts, for the Bible is both longer and more densely filled with attractive names than is the Qur’an. Even Jesus-proximate names like Salvador and Manuel were rarer in Spanish in 1400 than Isa was in Arabic. Islam also had the tradition, explained, for example, by Ibn Arabi (1165–1240), that saints were inspired by specific prophets, so that one could describe a saint as “Jesus-y” (*‘Isawi*).<sup>39</sup> Some Christian saints imitated Jesus (see Chapter 19) but no one called them Jesus-y.

36 Joel Morgan Upton, *Petrus Christus: His Place in Fifteenth-Century Flemish Painting* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State UP, 1990), 8; W. H. J. Weale, “Peintres bourgeois: les Christus, c.1412–1530,” *Annales de la Société d’Emulation de Bruges* 59 (1909): 100.

37 Mícheál B. Ó Mainnín, “‘Ag Cor Cuarta’: Leabhar Dhéan Leasa Móir, Clann Diarmada agus Filí Albanacha in Íochtar Chonnacht,” *Léann: Iris Chumann Léann na Litríochta* 5 (2019): 105–33; Wilson McLeod, *Divided Gaels: Gaelic Cultural Identities in Scotland and Ireland, c.1200–c.1650* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004), 94–95, 104, 155, 166.

38 Eugenio Albèri, ed., *Le opere di Galileo Galilei*, 15 vols. (Florence: Società Editrice Fiorentina, 1856), XV, 386.

39 Ibn Arabi noted that this adjective applied in particular to the disciples of this historical Jesus, who through miraculous longevity were contemporaries with the

### Jesus-Named Places

Places also bore the name of Jesus or of places associated with him. In England, Jerusalem was a hamlet in Lincolnshire. Montabaur was a German town just east of Koblenz named after Mount Tabor (the hill where Jesus's Transfiguration took place) by a thirteenth-century Archbishop of Trier, returning from the Holy Land, who saw a resemblance between a local hill and the original. The Archbishop hoped that the name would secure a more reliable protection than could be achieved by funding a military force. The Windesheim congregation named its new house in Ghent after the sea prominent in the gospels, Galilee. Camaldolese monks inhabited the abbey on the island of Monte Cristo off the coast of Tuscany. The Tuscan town of Borgo Santo Sepolcro was so named because, centuries earlier, pilgrims had brought to it relics from the Holy Sepulchre Church in Jerusalem.<sup>40</sup>

A number of Bethlehems also sprung up, although often these were explicitly linked not directly to Jesus, but to his mother. On the outskirts of Lisbon, the Portuguese Prince Henry the Navigator (1394–1460), Governor of the Order of Christ, built a church (1459) for Mary of Bethlehem. Henry's grandnephew Manuel I (1469–1521) later renovated the church into a monastery and built a defensive tower nearby. Although officially named for Saint Vincent, the tower popularly kept the Bethlehem name, and it and its environs are still called Belém, or Bethlehem, today.

What would become the most famous Bethlehem was founded in the thirteenth century as a London charity for collecting donations for a crusader church in the original Bethlehem. In the 1370s, it was seized by the English Crown, beginning a secularizing process. By 1403, it had become a hospital at least partly intended for the mentally ill, and the staff and doctors no longer wore the Star of Bethlehem emblem that had linked their predecessors with

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last prophet. Michel Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints: Prophethood and Sainthood in the Doctrine of Ibn 'Arabi* (Cambridge, UK: The Islamic Texts Society, 1993), 75–82; D. Terzioğlu, "Man in the Image of God in the Image of the Times: Sufi Self-Narratives and the Diary of Niyāzī-i Mısrī (1618–94)," *Studia Islamica* 94 (2002): 139–65, <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/1596215>

40 Agostino Cesaretti, *Istoria del principato di Piombino e osservazioni intorno ai diritti della corona di Toscana* (Florence: Stamperia Della Rosa, 1788), 100–04; Enzo Mattesini, ed., *Vie di pellegrinaggio medievale attraverso l'Alta Valle del Tevere* (Città di Castello: Petrucci, 1998), 46–7. See Karl Meister, *Geschichte der Stadt und Burg Montabaur* (Montabaur: Sauerborn, 1876), 92–93; John Van Engen, "A World Astir: Europe and Religion in the Early Fifteenth Century," in *Europe after Wyclif*, ed. J. Patrick Hornbeck II and Michael van Dussen (New York: Fordham, 2017), 11–45 (26).

the Bethlehemite order. In time, it became known as Bedlam, and entered the English vernacular to mean a place of chaos.<sup>41</sup>

The most important Bethlehem in the fifteenth century, in terms of imperial politics and the history of religion, was in Prague. In 1402, Jan Hus was chosen to be the new preacher at a chapel called Bethlehem. "Bethlehem" was shorthand for the Chapel of the Holy Innocents, so consecrated in honour of the children massacred by Herod in anticipation of Jesus's birth. A merchant had donated a Holy Innocent's bones to be interred within its foundations. Hus even founded a poor-student hospice behind the chapel, calling it Nazareth. The chapel's name "Bethlehem," literally in Hebrew "House of Bread," reached into the geography of the New Testament while also suggesting a sense of the metaphorical bread being fed to the preacher's audience.<sup>42</sup>

A variety of other buildings bore Jesus's name, or a Jesus association. By 1400, two Jesus-linked colleges at Cambridge were already a half century old: first, Trinity Hall and, second, Corpus Christi—more formally "The College of Corpus Christi and the Blessed Virgin Mary," founded by two guilds then recently united. In 1450, St. Salvator's College was established at St. Andrews. In 1496, a Benedictine nunnery at Cambridge, bearing the reputation of "a spiritual community of harlots," was dissolved by its bishop, and became converted into the new Jesus College.<sup>43</sup> In these, the links to Jesus, as when a college is named after a guild named after the body of Jesus, were more tenuous. Perhaps reformers in Prague would have renamed a brothel with "Jesus" as a nod to his association with sex workers; in Cambridge, that was less likely.

As an imperial capital, Constantinople had a high concentration of Jesus place names. The Galata Tower, built by the Genoese merchant colony in the middle of the fourteenth century, was called the "tower of Christ." The Chalke "Bronze" Gate to the Great Palace gave its name to a Jesus icon, which in turn gave *its* name to the tenth-century chapel, next to the gate, that housed it. The succession of names broke: the icon was lost in the ninth century, and the gate destroyed around the thirteenth, but the chapel and its name still endured. It was in use in the early fifteenth century, but later the Ottomans converted

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41 Thomas Dekker and Thomas Middleton, *The Honest Whore, Part I* (London: John Hodges, 1604), IV.iii, V.ii. See Nicholas Vincent, "Goffredo de Prefetti and the Church of Bethlehem in England," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* (1998): 213–35 (232), <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0022046998006319>

42 Michael Spinka, *John Hus: A Biography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1979), 40, 48; Frank Welsh, *The Battle for Christendom: The Council of Constance, 1415, and the Struggle to Unite Against Islam* (London: Constable, 2008), 108.

43 Society of Gentlemen, *The Biographical Dictionary, or, Complete Historical Library* (London: Newbery, 1780), 30–31.

the chapel into a stable for lions and elephants.<sup>44</sup> Some seventy metres to the northwest of the southernmost “Marble” tower of the Theodosian city wall, which runs from the Sea of Marmara north to the Golden Horn, was the Gate of Christ, with a nearby inscription “IC XC N[I]KA” (“Jesus Christ conquers”) decorating a cross.<sup>45</sup> Another tower on the Theodosian walls, between the Gate of Rhesios and the Fourth Military Gate, had the inscription, “O Christ, God, preserve Thy city undisturbed, and free from war. Conquer the wrath of the enemies.”<sup>46</sup> Jesus also appeared indirectly here, as the walls’ inscriptions describe some emperors as “emperor in Christ.” The Prepontius sea wall had two Jesus inscriptions on its northeast flank: a chi-rho monogram, and a cross near another “IC XC NIKA.” Scholars have argued that the existence of a sixteenth-century “Jesus Gate” madrasa (Isa Kapı Mescidi) may have been named after another, now lost, Gate of Christ in the inner Constantinian Walls.<sup>47</sup>

Assessing any given name for deep-ken power is difficult. The Constantinople use of the name on defensive architecture implies a military intent, compounded by the explicit invocation that Jesus “preserve Thy city undisturbed.” Even that Trier Archbishop’s explicit use of a Jesus name for defensive purposes is not necessarily conclusive, because his praise of the name as a superior alternative to traditional military forces might have just been a way to insult those traditional military forces.

We see another use of toponyms in the early-fifteenth-century devotional handbook *Giardino de oratione fructuoso* [Garden of Fruitful Prayer], but probably written by a Venetian canon regular. This *Garden of Fruitful Prayer* advises you to imprint the Jesus story in your mind by choosing a city very familiar to you (*la quale ti sia bene practica*), and locating parts of Jerusalem in that chosen city. The Garden similarly invites you to let people you know well

44 In the seventeenth century you could stand in the stable and still see some of the old chapel’s art. It was demolished around 1804. Alan Mikhail, *The Animal in Ottoman Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2014); Suraiya Faruqi, “Exotic Animals at the Sultans’ Court,” in *Another Mirror for Princes: The Public Image of the Ottoman Sultans and its Reception*, ed. Suraiya Faruqi (Istanbul: Isis Press, 2008), 93–94.

45 David Hendrix, “Theodosian Walls,” *The Byzantine Legacy Project* (2016), <https://www.thebyzantinelegacy.com/theodosian-walls>

46 “ΧΡΙCΤΕ Ω ΘΕΟC ΑΤΑΡΑΧΟΝ ΚΑΙ ΑΠΟΛΕΜΟΝ ΦΥΛΑΤΤΕ ΤΗΝ ΠΟΛΙΝ COY ΝΙΚΑ ΤΟ ΜΕΝΟC ΤΩΝ ΠΟΛΕΜΙΩΝ.” See Alexander Van Millingen, *Byzantine Constantinople: The Walls of the City and Adjoining Historical Sites* (London: John Murray, 1899), 100. The location is 41°00’57.8”N 28°55’21.3”E.

47 C. A. Mango, “The Byzantine Inscriptions of Constantinople: A Bibliographical Survey,” *American Journal of Archaeology* 55.1 (1951): 52–66 (56); Hilary Sumner-Boyd and John Freely, *Strolling Through Istanbul: A Guide to the City* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2010), 326.

(*lequale tu habbi pratiche*) represent the principal people in Jesus's life.<sup>48</sup> If your city already had Jesus-related place names, this projection of Jerusalem onto it became all the easier.

## Cult of the Name

The best way to fathom the deep-ken power of "Jesus" is to watch the cult develop around the name itself. Breastfeeding her children, Dorothea of Montau (d. 1394) kept Jesus's name "in the heart and in the mouth," so that they consumed his sweet name within her milk.<sup>49</sup> In 1381, the beatification was completed of the German mystic Henry Suso (1295–1366), who had used a knife to carve the name into his chest. This kind of enthusiasm made the name cult controversial, as did its association with Joan of Arc (ca. 1412–31), who may have been influenced by Suso's teachings.<sup>50</sup> She empowered her letters by writing "Jesus" and "Mary" before the salutation. At one point, Joan explained that her secretaries wrote the names on her letters because it was *decebat* [fitting]. Her ring had the same names inscribed. Her battle standard, which she considered "forty times" better than her sword, had the names Jesus and Mary ("Jhesus Maria") embroidered with silk amid fleurs-de-lys. Her other banners featured the Crucifixion or Jesus in Judgment. During her execution she requested a crucifix to gaze upon as she passed, which a Dominican friar held for her. Her last word was "Jesus," repeated until she died. Sometimes the motivation was more worldly: Joan could use holy names as codes instructing a trusted reader not to obey her orders as written, which might have prompted her to laugh when the English made her sign her statement of abjuration with a

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48 *Giardino de oratione fructuoso* (Venice: Simon Bevilacqua, 1496), fol. 60r, 69r–v. See Stanislao da Campagnola, "'Giardino di orazione' e altri scritti di un anonimo del quattrocento. Un'errata attribuzione a Niccolò da Osimo," *Collectanea Franciscana* 41 (1971): 55–59.

49 *Das Leben der heiligen Dorothea von Johannes Marienwerder*, ed. Max Töppen (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1863), 220.

50 George H. Tavard, "Jeanne and the Clergy," in *Joan of Arc and Spirituality*, ed. Ann W. Astell and Bonnie Wheeler (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 129–46 (136), [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-06954-2\\_7](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-06954-2_7)

cross.<sup>51</sup> A preacher in Spain suggested that Christians sew the Jesus name onto their clothes, simply to make it obvious that they were not Jews.<sup>52</sup>

The most successful promoter of the Jesus name was Bernardino of Siena (1380–1444), one of the great preachers in an age of great preachers. His understudy, John of Capistrano (1386–1456), said that Bernardino would preach for four or five hours at a time. Citing the last chapter of Mark's Gospel (16:17), "In my name you will cast out demons," Bernardino explained that Jesus's name was *santo e terribile* [holy and terrible]: "Holy for saints and good people, terrible for demons and wicked people and bedeviled men," for "demons flee the name of Jesus like snakes flee the odour of vines' fragrant flowers." Bernardino expanded the name's power beyond the demonological, touting its protection against pestilence, war, and shipwreck.<sup>53</sup>

A master marketer, Bernardino designed his own logo: the IHS monogram in Gothic letters, in front of a beaming sun on a blue background. The IHS triplet of letters, a Latinization of the abbreviation of Jesus's Greek name, the first three letters of ΙΗΣΟΥΣ, had long been in use. Bernardino kept handy an oversized tablet bearing this symbol as he preached, and at the fifth hour's rhetorical peak he would elevate the IHS to receive the audience's devotions. On one occasion, an eyewitness at Siena in 1425 reported that the mere sight of this symbol exorcised possessed people of "unclean spirits."<sup>54</sup>

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- 51 Régine Pernoud, *Joan of Arc By Herself and Her Witnesses*, trans. Edward Hyams (Lanham: Scarborough House, 1994), 60–62, 177, 186, 217, 231–34; Jules-Étienne-Joseph Quicherat, ed., *Procès de condamnation et de réhabilitation de Jeanne d'Arc, dite la Pucelle*, 5 vols. (Paris: Renouard, 1841–45), I, 78–83, 183–85, III, 104; Willard Trask, ed., *Joan of Arc in Her Own Words* (New York: Turtle Point, 1996), 26–28, 47, 52.
- 52 John Edwards, "Bishop Juan Arias Dávila of Segovia: 'Judaizer' or Reformer?," in *Religion and Society in Spain, c. 1492*, ed. John Edwards (Aldershot: Variorum, 1996), X.71–86 (78). See Denis Renevey, *Devotion to the Name of Jesus in Medieval English Literature, c. 1100–c. 1530* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780192894083.001.0001>
- 53 Bernardino of Siena, *Le Prediche Volgari*, ed. Ciro Cannarozzi, 2 vols. (Pistoia: Pacinotti, 1934), II, 198–202. See Katherine Jansen, "The Word and Its Diffusion," in *Christianity in Western Europe, c.1100–c.1500*, ed. Miri Rubin and Walter Simons, Cambridge History of Christianity 4 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2009), 114–32 (129); Loman McAodha, "The Holy Name of Jesus in the Preaching of St. Bernardine of Siena," *Franciscan Studies* 29 (1969): 37–65; Franco Mormando, *The Preacher's Demons: Bernardino of Siena and the Social Underworld of Early Renaissance Italy* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 104.
- 54 Daniel Arasse, "Iconographie et évolution spirituelle: la tablette de saint Bernardin de Sienne," *Revue d'histoire de la spiritualité* 50 (1974): 433–56; Ephrem Longpré, "S. Bernardin de Sienne et le nom de Jésus," *Archivum franciscanum historicum* 28 (1935): 443–76; 29 (1936): 142–68, 443–77; 30 (1937): 170–92; Mormando, *The Preacher's Demons*, 88, 104; Vincenzo Pacelli, "Il 'Monogramma' bernardiniano," *La Croce* 3 (2007): 407–35.

Enthusiasm for using the “Jesus” name surged. An apparently friendly spirit had moved in with a family near Mantua, conversing, dancing, singing, and sleeping with the family’s daughter—until Bernardino warned them of the potential scandal and prescribed the Holy Name to exorcise it. Babies in Florence received IHS amulets at their baptisms. A 1415 municipal law in that city declared that blaspheming the name of Jesus would result in a hundred-lire fine, which, unpaid, would upgrade to being flogged, naked, in the streets. In Florence, by the end of the century, audiences at executions would cry out Jesus’s name.<sup>55</sup>

Bernardino’s promotion of the Holy Name of Jesus was controversial, not least for its novelty. This was new and threatening to the authorities. Theologians accused him of destroying devotion for established things, like the mass and the cross. One of his critics worried that this new deep-ken use of “Jesus” might encourage the same for “devil.” The scholar Andrea Biglia (ca. 1395–1435) was alarmed by Bernardino’s obsession with demons, for “the name of the devil is heard no less than the name of Jesus in your sermons from your mouth.” A housewife in Bologna shared Biglia’s alarm, and would spit on the ground each time Bernardino mentioned the devil’s name, in an attempt to negate the power of “devil.” Unruffled, Bernardino jabbed back, denouncing her spitting as a sign of her body’s being full of “thousands of devils.”<sup>56</sup>

Was Bernardino the Antichrist, an idolater, or a magician? Some charged that the IHS was a Jewish component in Bernardino’s spells. His opponent Biglia saw in Bernardino’s use of the holy name nothing more than wizards’ use of magical letters. “Why,” Biglia asked rhetorically, “do we blame and condemn magi, fortunetellers, and conjurors, except that having used their faith they summon the response and help of demons through certain letters? And all of this is a kind of sacrilege, to esteem forms for objects.”<sup>57</sup> Biglia here does not doubt the efficacy of the name, but protests against the deep-ken collapse of names into named, and against the powers thus made available.

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55 Bernardino of Siena, *Le Prediche Volgari*, II, 199–200; Michel Klutch, *Statuta populi et communis Florentiae: publica auctoritate, collecta, castigata et praeposita anno salutis MCCCCXV* (Freiburg: Firenze Stamperia Bonducciana, ca. 1778), book 1, 256–57. See Lauro Martines, *Fire in the City: Savonarola and the Struggle for the Soul of Renaissance Florence* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006), 276; Mormando, *The Preacher’s Demons*, 281.

56 Andrea Biglia, “Liber de institutis, discipulis et doctrina fratris Bernardini Orinis Minorum,” in Baudouin de Gaiffier, “La mémoire d’André Biglia sur la prédication de Saint Bernardin de Sienne,” *Analecta Bollandiana* 53 (1935): 303–58 (349–50). See Mormando, *The Preacher’s Demons*, 20.

57 Biglia, “Liber de institutis,” 318. See Mormando, *The Preacher’s Demons*, 10, 88.



Other critics took a more plain-ken angle, and found problems in Bernardino's psychological motivation. Poggio Bracciolini's (1380–1459) 1429 *De avaritia* [On Avarice] dismissed the name cult as an expression of Bernardino's need for attention. The pomp of Bernardino's arrival in Spoleto in 1426 vexed its bishop: "Christ does not come to Jerusalem on Palm Sunday with such honour and clamour and voices, as when this beast," Bernardino, "comes."<sup>58</sup>

Such opposition could be dangerous. One man said his brother was murdered for criticizing the name cult, with the cultists celebrating the murder as miracle "in the name of good Jesus."<sup>59</sup>

Finally, in 1426, Rome ordered Bernardino to the papal court to be tried for heresy. Preaching at Viterbo when the summons reached him, Bernardino explained to his followers that "I am going to Rome to be cremated by fire and you, enjoying peace and tranquility, will remain behind. They are calling me a heretic and the word circulating in Rome is that I must be burned at the stake." He was acquitted, and again, in 1432, Pope Eugene IV (1388–1447) confirmed his innocence and his status as "a most acute and rigorous eradicator of heresy." Even then, Bernardino was investigated, again in vain, at the Council of Basel (1438).<sup>60</sup>

Suspicion toward the cult of the Holy Name persisted until the 1530s, but that shadow did not retard its growth, even beyond Italy. The Benedictine André Dias de Escobar (1348–1448), titular Bishop of Megara, in 1432 compiled a list of thirty-three miracles linked to the Holy Name. In response to an outbreak of plague in Lisbon he established a local Holy Name cult, supported by an altar and a confraternity, in the Dominican priory. There, a carpenter fell off his horse and broke a leg. Afterward, he drank water "in" Jesus's name, and overnight was so healed that he could go to work the next morning.<sup>61</sup> Jesus saved Dubrovnik from an earthquake that began on Ascension Day, 1520, and lasted twenty months, for it was not truly an earthquake, but a whipping from God (*flagelo di Dio*). In

58 Riccardo Fubini, "Poggio Bracciolini and San Bernardino: The Themes and Motives of a Polemic," in *Humanism and Secularization from Petrarch to Valla*, trans. Martha King (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2002), 66–88; Longpré, "S. Bernardin de Sienne et le nom de Jésus," 29: 452.

59 Longpré, "S. Bernardin de Sienne et le nom de Jésus," 29: 260–61.

60 Mormando, *The Preacher's Demons*, 89.

61 Mário Martins, *Laudes e cantigas espirituais de Mestre André Dias* (Lisbon: Negrelos 1951), 291; Iona McCleery, "Christ More Powerful Than Galen?: The Relationship Between Medicine and Miracles," in *Contextualizing Miracles in the Christian West, 1100–1500: New Historical Approaches*, ed. M. M. Mesley and L. E. Wilson, *Medium Aevum Monographs* (Oxford: Society for the Study of Medieval Languages and Literature, 2014), 127–54 (150–54), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv23khnzg.8>; María Eugenia Los Diaz Tena, "Milagros do Bom Jesus de las Laudes e Cantigas de André Dias," *Via Spiritus* 22 (2015): 71–95; António Domingues de Sousa Costa, *Mestre André Dias de Escobar, figura ecuménica do século XV* (Rome: n.p., 1967).

thanks, the city completed a church of the Holy Saviour by 1528, its first in the Renaissance architectural style. The IHS initials were gratefully carved into its lintel, under which worshippers would enter the church. That symbol became commonly seen on building facades throughout Italy and other parts of western Europe.<sup>62</sup> Each appearance testified to a successful miracle; their continuing presence advertised and confirmed the efficacy of the cult.

At the end of Bernardino's life, his assistant, John of Capistrano, expanded the Name tour into central Europe, Saxony and Poland, preaching against the Hussites. His posse included interpreters to translate his Latin into the audiences' German and Polish. Coordinating with John Hunyadi (ca. 1406–56), the voivode of Transylvania, John organized a crusader army of peasants who managed to lift Sultan Mehmed II's (1432–81) siege of Belgrade (1456). His crusaders used Jesus's name as a weapon, for uttering it could kill an Ottoman outright. The Ottomans might well have understood their potential danger—the name of Jesus was also powerful in Islam. In one hadith tradition, Muhammad advised that reciting the *shahada* confession of faith with Jesus's name added to it guaranteed the reciter Paradise. The peasant-crusaders credited the name of Jesus with their victory, but upon hearing that nobles were approaching to assume leadership after the battle, the peasants set fire to the booty they had won. They could not stop the lords from stealing the credit away from Jesus, but could deny them the spoils.<sup>63</sup>

## Supplications

Some invocations of the Jesus name come with details or context that make clear their deep ken. A variety of people used a variety of words to make changes in the universe. Contemporaries carefully divided these into different categories, depending especially on whether the intent was pious or diabolical, but there

62 Paola Albini, "A Survey of the Past Earthquakes in the Eastern Adriatic (14<sup>th</sup> to Early 19<sup>th</sup> Century)," *Annals of Geophysics* 47 (2004): 675–703 (688, 694–95), <https://doi.org/10.4401/ag-3331>; Mormando, *The Preacher's Demons*, 44, 88, 258; Speratus Nodilo, ed., *Annales Ragusini Anonymi* (Zagreb: Sumptibus Academiae Scientiarum et Artium ex Officina Societatis Typographicae, 1883), 98–99, 277.

63 Nicholas of Fara, "Vita clarissimi viri fratris Joannis de Capistrano," in *Acta Sanctorum Octobris*, ed. Josepho van Hecke, Benjamine Bossue, Victore de Buck, and Eduardo Carpentier, 68 vols. (Paris: Victor Palmè, 1869), X, 471–72; Michael Bihl, "Duae epistolae S. Iohannis a Capistrano, altera ad Ladislaum Regem, altera de victoria Belgradensi (an. 1453 et 1456)," *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum* 19 (1926): 63–75. See Norman Housley, *Crusading in the Fifteenth Century: Message and Impact* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 105–08; Jansen, "The Word and Its Diffusion," 125; Suleiman A. Mourad, "Jesus," in *Medieval Islamic Civilization: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Josef Meri, 2 vols. (New York: Routledge, 2006), I, 415.

is value in treating them all as variations on a single tool. In some cases, people made requests of Jesus, sometimes invoking him explicitly by name. We might think of supplications as extended forms of the Jesus name, and ones relatively easy to understand. Naming a ship Jesus might or might not imply an expectation that the name brought power with it, but these supplications usually specified an objective.

To get a sense of what these supplications looked like, we can examine references to Jesus in runic inscriptions in Scandinavia. An inscription asking for an “Our Father for” souls, or that “Jesus be gracious to” souls, was common in this genre in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, as in “May Jesus Christ be gracious to Auðreifr of Snægrindr’s soul.”<sup>64</sup> In the middle and later fifteenth century, we also see Jesus associated with more mundane supplications. Runes carved into one stick read, “In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen. May God’s Five Wounds be [my] medicine. May my medicine be Holy Cross and Christ’s passion. He who moulded and washed me with Holy Blood. May he expel the fever which strives to torment me.”<sup>65</sup> The names of the evangelists appear in another invocation, next to Jesus and Mary, whose name repeats, in this type of source, twice as frequently as her son’s.<sup>66</sup> Another runic stick, from sometime before 1393, notes that “Mary bore Christ, Elisabeth bore John the Baptist” before ordering an unborn baby to “receive redemption in veneration of them.” That invocation continues, with the supplicant’s voice merging consonantly with God’s: “Go out, hairless one. The Lord calls you into the light.”<sup>67</sup> Even a single work might illustrate the range

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64 Sven B.F. Jansson, Elias Wessen, and Elisabeth Svärdström, *Gotlands runinskrifter*, 2 vols. (Stockholm: Kungl. Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademien, 1978), II, 81–82 (G 168); “Runeinnskrifter fra Gotland,” <https://www.arild-hauge.com/se-runeinnskrifter-gotland.htm>; Runic inscription G 168 in Scandinavian Runic-text Database 2020, Department of Scandinavian Languages, Uppsala University, <http://kulturarvsdata.se/uu/srdb/296b3d1b-f553-4cb5-9ecd-76b5b05f6181>

65 Runic inscription N 632 in Scandinavian Runic-text Database 2020, <http://kulturarvsdata.se/uu/srdb/2f97c401-14fa-4f48-aeb0-a6cf98ba0525>; “Nummerrekkefølge,” [https://www.arild-hauge.com/innskrifter-etter\\_nummer.htm](https://www.arild-hauge.com/innskrifter-etter_nummer.htm); James E. Knirk, *Norges innskrifter med de yngre runer*, 6 vols. (Oslo: I kommisjon hos J. Dybwad, 1941), VI, 55 (N 632).

66 Runic inscription N 638 in Scandinavian Runic-text Database 2020, <http://kulturarvsdata.se/uu/srdb/2771cce5-ae78-440f-812e-337398aa62d2>; “Nummerrekkefølge,” [https://www.arild-hauge.com/innskrifter-etter\\_nummer.htm](https://www.arild-hauge.com/innskrifter-etter_nummer.htm)

67 Runic inscription N 631 in Scandinavian Runic-text Database 2020, <http://kulturarvsdata.se/uu/srdb/d5bbc1fd-7c95-435c-b45d-fd4260daf614>; “Nummerrekkefølge,” [https://www.arild-hauge.com/innskrifter-etter\\_nummer.htm](https://www.arild-hauge.com/innskrifter-etter_nummer.htm). This is currently exhibited at the Bryggen Museum in Bergen (BRM0/13894). See Doesjka Tilkin, *Ave Maria och Jesus Kristus Nazarenius: Latin i skandinaviska runinristningar* (MA thesis, University of Ghent, 2015); Kristel Zilmer, “Runic

of possible supplication requests: in the poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, “Christ” or his cross is invoked to commend people, to thank people, to ask that generosity be repaid, to propose retreat, to pledge loyalty, to protect a house, and to “bring all men to His bliss!”<sup>68</sup>

Verbal supplication had many forms, everything from formal prayers and liturgical formula, to language nonsensical in our time if not in theirs. Location and frequency of the deployment of the name mattered. A deep-ken exploitation of mathematics recurred. One mid-fifteenth-century English text for devotion to the Passion was called the *Revelation of the Hundred Pater Nosters*. Consider one woodcut of the Crucifixion, splattered with blood-like red paint, and a poem affixed to a prayer collection box. Someone had penned onto the woodcut, “It is read that Christ received 5,440 5,460 wounds for our redemption. Whoever therefore completes each day of the year fifteen paternosters and the same number of Ave Marias should know that he has uttered one paternoster and one angelic greeting for each wound.”<sup>69</sup> Mathematically, 5,460 is achieved through 15 prayers said over 364 days. Perhaps some editor thought the mathematics outweighed whatever tradition had produced 5,440, and made the correction. Similarly, one fifteenth-century Irish manuscript references Jesus’s 6,666 wounds.<sup>70</sup> Other fifteenth-century calculations reach 547,500.<sup>71</sup> Efficacy lay in those numbers.

In some traditions the number of wounds was revealed by Jesus himself. These seem to date back to a ca. 1339 Book of Hours which included a poem “Van den Clusenaere” [From the Cloistered]. Here Jesus gave the number 5,565 to an inquiring male recluse, and prescribed him to pray fifteen paternosters and fifteen Ave Marias each day.<sup>72</sup> Ludolph of Saxony’s (ca. 1295–1378) *Life of Christ*

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Sticks and other Inscribed Objects from Medieval Bergen,” *Maal og Minne* 112 (2020): 65–100.

- 68 Marie Boroff, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight: An Authoritative Translation, Context, Criticism* (London: W.W. Norton and Co., 2010), lines 595, 839, 1064, 1135, 1307, 1949, 1982, 2071, 2120, 2472, 2527.
- 69 BSB Clm 20122, fol. 88. See David S. Areford, “The Passion Measured: A Late-Medieval Diagram of the Body of Christ,” in *The Broken Body: Passion Devotion in Late-Medieval Culture*, ed. A. A. MacDonald, H. N. B. Ridderbos, and R. M. Schlusemann (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1998), 211–38; Peter Schmidt and Rainer Schoch, *Origins of European Printmaking: Fifteenth Century Woodcuts and Their Public* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 2005), 181–82.
- 70 Andrew Breeze, “The Charter of Christ in Medieval English, Welsh and Irish,” *Celtica* 19 (1987): 111–20 (119). See Andrew Breeze, “The Number of Christ’s Wounds,” *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* 32 (1985): 84–91.
- 71 Edward Stillingfleet, *An Answer to Several Late Treatises* (London: Mortlock, 1673), 482.
- 72 The poem is reproduced in P. Leendertz, Jr., “Het Zutfensch-Groningsche Handschrift,” *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsche Taal- en Letterkunde* 15 (1896): 277–83.

includes a similar account, although the gender of the recluse is there female, and the number dropped to 5,490.<sup>73</sup>

Frequency of prayer, even without powerful, deep-ken target numbers, was also important. A Dominican nun named Elisabeth had a baseline prayer routine, itself performed repeatedly, including 36,000 paternosters, in addition to 209,000 other prayers, and an unspecified additional number “which I must leave out for the sake of brevity.”<sup>74</sup> My personal best speed—almost beyond intelligibility—for a paternoster is eight seconds. If Elisabeth matched my speed—and her ideal may well have slowed into meaningfulness—it would take her eighty hours of continuous prayer to work through the paternosters alone.

Supplicants sought the help of a variety of beings. One Danish hymn-prayer to Mary, a loose translation of the *Stabat Mater*, requested salvation by appealing to the Madonna’s relationship with Jesus: “O maiden mild, go to your child / with motherly prayer when death is near / and save my soul from peril.” The choice of Mary made sense, given the appeal to her motherhood. Similarly, Sister Clara of Ostren (d. 1447) wanted to sing in the choir, but lacked the voice. She prayed to Mary, citing Jesus’s “jubilant” and “sweet voice” which he used after Easter to tell her “that all pain had been taken from him and no pain would ever touch him again.” Mary granted the request, and Clara received the voice she sought.<sup>75</sup>

Another prayer turned to the Christ Child for protection from his anger: “O door unlocked; O torch of six flames; O dear child of Bethlehem, repress thy wrath and save me. O arm unsurpassed in strength, bind this foolish heart that I may willingly take up my cross after thee.”<sup>76</sup> Our own association of the Baby Jesus with sweetness finds little purchase here.

A supplication could appeal to multiple authorities. A French conjuror (ca. 1430s) could, “by the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost,” summon Satan.<sup>77</sup> In Córdoba, if your spouse was missing, you might hire Inés Alonso, who would trace a circle around a cross before appealing to both Jesus and the devil

73 Ludolphus of Saxony, *Vita Christi* (1374), chapter 58. See Arthur L-F. Askins, “Notes on Three Prayers in Late 15<sup>th</sup>. Century Portuguese,” *Península 4* (2007): 235–66 (242–43); Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, ca. 1400–ca. 1580* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1992), 248–56.

74 Johannes Meyer, *Women’s History in the Age of Reformation: Johannes Meyer’s Chronicle of the Dominican Observance*, trans. Claire Taylor Jones (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2019), 120.

75 Meyer, *Women’s History*, 98–99. See David W. Colbert, “The Middle Ages,” in *History of Danish Literature*, ed. Sven Rossel (Omaha: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), 1–70 (39).

76 Philip Bocht Ó hUiginn, *Philip Bocht Ó hUiginn*, ed. Lambert McKenna (Dublin: Talbot, 1931), 192.

77 Hyatte, ed., *Laughter for the Devil*, 70.

while using the beginning of the paternoster as a spell (1524).<sup>78</sup> One might also supplicate living humans to supplicate more ethereal powers: Swedish inscriptions preceded the request for prayers with a cross, the year (“Anno Domini”), and the nearest feast day to the time of death. One example from Visby Domkyrka runs, “In the year of our Lord 1431 on the Holy Virgin Agatha’s Day Johannes Reberch died. Pray for him.”<sup>79</sup> Before being executed, by hanging and subsequent burning, Gilles de Rais asked the parents “whose children he had murdered that, for the love of the Passion of Our Lord, they pray to God for him and forgive him in good heart.”<sup>80</sup>

A variety of physical objects might improve the efficiency of the supplication. The stylized Alekseevsky cross (ca. 1380s), with each of the four arms widening at the end, was installed in the cathedral church in Novgorod. An inscription acknowledged the patronage of Archbishop Alexy (d. 1390) and asked God to grant long life and salvation to him, to his children, and to everyone.<sup>81</sup> One Danish leechbook, from before 1400, describes a potion for curing licentiousness: in “the name of our lord Jesus Christ and saint Christopher,” dilute gladiola juice with wine or water while reading the paternoster.<sup>82</sup>

Sometimes the verbal supplication was written down on paper or parchment, which then itself became a tool to make the request more persuasive. In these cases, perhaps it no longer needed to be voiced at all; the physical existence of its written form might suffice as a kind of permanent, silent supplication. None of these had to be legible to humans to work, and perhaps that illegibility increased their power. Latin Jesus prayers written down may have done more than merely convey information. A mid-fifteenth-century parchment had the Latin Jn 1:1–14 on one side, and on the other a shorter text, about a sixth of the

78 Sebastián Cirac Estopañán, *Los procesos de hechicerías en la Inquisición de Castilla la Nueva* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1942), 115–16.

79 Jan Wilhelm Hamner, *Visby Domkyrkas Gravstenar* (Stockholm: Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademien Stockholm Wahlström, 1933), 45–46. See Joseph M. Gonzalez, “Sleeping Bodies, Jubilant Souls: The Fate of the Dead in Sweden 1400–1700,” *Canadian Journal of History* 40 (2005): 199–228, <http://dx.doi.org/10.3138/cjh.40.2.199>

80 Hyatte, ed., *Laughter for the Devil*, 156.

81 Т. Ю. Царевская, *Собор Святой Софии в Великом Новгороде* (Novgorod: Novgorod Diocese, 2008), 51–53; Макарий, *Археологическое описание церковных древностей в Новгороде и его окрестностях* (Moscow: n.p., 1860), part 1, 52–53; И. И. Срезневский, *Древние памятники русского письма и языка* (St. Petersburg: Imperial Academy, 1882), col. 217.

82 “Det Arnamagnæanske håndskrift,” Institut for Nordiske Studier og Sprogvidenskab, University of Copenhagen, Nr. 187, fol. 28rv. Stephen A. Mitchell, *Witchcraft and Magic in the Nordic Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 226 suggests the “Devils arrows” refer to elfshot or to “wantonness and adultery.”

gospel passage's length: *Sanctus sanctus sanctus dominus deus sabaoth pleni sunt celus et terra gloria tua osanna excelsis agyos ys[ter]<sup>84</sup>os tetragramaton. Jesus Nazarenus rex Judeorum. benio. Bi<sup>o</sup> bu<sup>o</sup> bi<sup>o</sup>.* The first fifteen of these words are text from the Sanctus, a component of the mass, after which follows a reference to the "holy womb," the name of God, and "Jesus of Nazarus King of the Jews," which was the title placed over Jesus at the Crucifixion according to Jn 19. The circles drawn on the *sanctus* side, alongside the way the writing has been physically worn, implies its use as an amulet (see Chapter 8).<sup>83</sup>

The effects sought by supplications were no less varied than their methods. There could be a consonance among the supplication text, the identity of the authority, and the miracle sought. For example, one 1403–04 poem, from the life of the Serbian King Stefan Dečanski (ca. 1276–1331), had St. Nicholas comforting a newly blinded Stefan: "Do not you grieve / for the pupils of your eyes are in my hands." The king's pupils miraculously appeared. Later, Nicholas returned to Stefan, explaining that Jesus was able to repeat the miracles performed in the gospels for Stefan: "Jesus Christ, Our Lord / who gave sight to men born blind / gives now your eyes their primal ray of light."<sup>84</sup> Giolla Críost Táilliúr wrote a verse wishing rabies and cancer on wolves before praying, "Every wolf [...] who hunt by waiting on their haunches, / may Christ send destruction on you all [...] may God's Son with new purpose / lop away that misshapen brood."<sup>85</sup> Here the poet-suppliant may have intended consonance between wolves and thieves, as a way to achieve protection from robbery by humans.

One modern scholar has commented that "devout medieval people collected prayers the way twentieth-century cooks collect recipes."<sup>86</sup> This simile helps us integrate the so-called "religious" into daily life, for it restores the practicality that prayers and spells enjoyed before modernity narrowed our awareness. Just as a cook culls recipes to remove the ones that do not work, so too the medieval

83 C. R. Unger and H. J. Huitfeldt, ed., *Diplomatarium Norvegicum*, 22 vols. (Christiania: P. T. Mallings, 1869), VII, 440–41, no. 441. See Richard Ettinghausen, "Arabic Epigraphy: Communication or Symbolic Affirmation," in *Near Eastern Numismatics, Iconography, Epigraphy and History: Studies in Honor of George C. Miles*, ed. Dickran K. Kouymjian (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1974), 297–317; Mitchell, *Witchcraft and Magic*, 48–49.

84 Milne Holton and Vasa D. Mihailovich, *Serbian Poetry from the Beginnings to the Present* (New Haven, CT: Yale Center for International and Area Studies, 1988), 28–29.

85 Giolla Críost Táilliúr, "Beannuigh do Theaghlach, a Thríonóid," in *Duanaire Na Sracaire: Anthology of Medieval Gaelic Poetry*, ed. Wilson McLeod and Meg Bateman (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2007), 234–39 (their translation).

86 Virginia Reinburg, "Prayer and the Book of Hours," in *Time Sanctified: The Book of Hours in Medieval Art and Life*, ed. Roger S. Weick (New York: George Braziller, 1988), 39–44 (40).

devout optimized prayer collecting for maximum efficacy. Moreover, for cooks like me, using a recipe is no guarantee of achieving the intended result. It is important to remember how pragmatic and empirical these supplicant-scientists were, even when they proceeded in ways that we discount today. Even contemporary humour took advantage of the clean cause-and-effect efficiency of medical remedies. One commentator proposed reforming the Church in the form of a cure for the “stomach of Saint Peter”: “Take twenty-four cardinals, one hundred archbishops and prelates, of any nation, and as many priests as you have. They are to be plunged into the Rhine’s water, and held submersed for three days,”<sup>87</sup> a subversive echo of Jesus’s three days in the tomb.

These supplications could be controversial, especially on the Muslim side. The Naqshbandi Sufi order did not approve of the earlier wonder-working Sufis: for such wonders were not performed by prophets, and so were not proper “miracles.” One early-fifteenth-century Naqshbandi, Maulana Ya’qub Charkhi (1360–1447), described these unauthorized wonders as “the menstrual discharge of men.”<sup>88</sup> Baha’ al-Din Naqshband Bukhari (1318–89) pointedly asserted that, instead, the greatest miracle is orthodoxy itself. This attitude had precedents: Muhammad’s single great miracle (the low quantity implied a high quality) was the Qur’an, and the Buddha considered true teachings to be one of three categories of the miraculous.

The most refined supplication was no supplication at all, but a vocal—or even silent—invocation of the divine presence. *Dhikr* is the saying of the divine names or attributes, sometimes synchronized with bodily movements, perhaps even entire dances. The early-fourteenth-century manual by Ibn ‘Ata Allah al-Iskandari (1259–1310) defined *dhikr* as “liberation from ignorance and forgetfulness through the permanent presence of the heart with the Truth.” In practice, *dhikr* was “the repetition of the Name Invoked by the heart and the tongue.”<sup>89</sup> Abu Nasr al-Sarraj (d. 988) compared baby Jesus to the mystic’s heart, and *dhikr* to the milk Jesus drank from his mother.<sup>90</sup> Scholars debated whether *dhikr* should be done vocally or silently; both methods traced their origins back to the Muhammad. Silent *dhikr*, less linked to bodily movements, was especially

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87 Pierre d’Ailly, “Canones Reformationis Ecclesiae in Concilio Constantiensi,” in *Magnum Oecumenicum Constantiense Concilium*, ed. Hermann von der Hardt, 6 vols. (Frankfurt: Genschii, 1696), I, part 8, 499.

88 Quoted in Hamid Algar, “Silent and Vocal Dhikr in the Naqshbandi Order,” in *Akten des VII Kongresses für Arabistik und Islamwissenschaft* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1976), 43.

89 Ibn-‘Aṭā’ allāh al-Iskandari, *The Key to Salvation* (Cambridge, UK: Islamic Texts Society, 1996), 45.

90 Quoted in Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 168.



promoted by the Naqshbandiya; its goal was the tranquility referenced in Qur'an 9:40. Baha' al-Din, who had established the order, also affirmed the principle of exclusively silent *dhikr*: when even his teacher vocalized *dhikr*, Baha' al-Din would simply walk away. The Naqshbandi 'Abd al-Rahman Jami (1414–92) cautioned that if the person next to you knew you were doing *dhikr*, then you were doing it wrong. Vocal *dhikr* was too ostentatious.<sup>91</sup> No deep-ken significance was lost in silence; for some, silence even heightened it.

### Envoi

As an inherently plain-ken historian, even one sympathetic to the deep ken, I tend not to understand the special, deep-ken meaning of words. During our travels looking for images of Jesus, my assistants and I quickly developed a shorthand in which a search became a "hunt" and the images of Jesus became "jesuses." There is historical precedent, from our period, for the latter: the first known use in English of calling something "a" Jesus in a generic sense lies in a 1487 will which lists among the estate "my Jhus of gold."<sup>92</sup> During our research, both "jesuses" and "hunts" for them proved controversial in some circles. In Bosnia, our hosts frowned on "hunting" Jesus, not because it made Jesus sound like a deer, but because it made Him sound like a war criminal. Sensitive readers of early drafts of this manuscript warned against references to "jesuses," even when clearly meaning "images of Jesus." Similarly, some object to "Xmas" as an abbreviation for "Christmas," regardless of historical precedent and the X's origins in the Greek letter for the "Ch" sound (uppercase X, lowercase χ), the first letter in "Christ." Still, prudence is prudent. Thus "Jesus" maintains some of its deep-ken power today.

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91 Algar, "Silent and Vocal Dhikr," 43–44; Louis Gardet, "Un problème de mystique comparée: la mention du nom Divin (DHIKR) dans la mystique Musulmane," *Revue Thomiste* 52 (1952): 642–79.

92 "The Will of Richard Laurence," 27 November 1487, Kew, National Archives, PROB 11/8/108, fol. 40r.

## 18. Elevated Speech and Song

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Jalal-al-Din al-Suyuti (1445–1505) wants to control how you say “Jesus” in Arabic. For the word “Isa,” he insists the letter alif (“a”) be voiced, just a bit, like an “e.” This tendency, called *imala* [inclination], is the subject of an entire chapter in his treatise the *Itqan* [Precision]. With a plain-ken interest in particular variations on normative pronunciation, al-Suyuti noted that this inclination occurred among the Bedouins of central Arabia. The entire chapter—on a modified pronunciation of this one vowel—includes ten “causes,” four “reasons,” instructions for the tongue, and dozens of citations of authorities.<sup>1</sup> Precision mattered.

When people referred to Jesus as a personal name, or invoked Jesus in prayer, they needed to only speak carefully enough to be understood. This chapter looks at more systematic and controlled ways of vocalizing the word “Jesus” and Jesus-related texts, in terms of factors like pronunciation, volume, breath control, and coordination with other peoples’ utterances.

Systematizing Jesus vocalization with regular rules created subtle connections accessible only through the deep ken. Some Muslims scholars, especially, who were inclined towards the plain ken did take into account human limitations and historical, cultural particularities, as with al-Suyuti’s interest in the Bedouins. For the most part, however, this chapter serves as an acoustic lake for the deep ken to dive into. Two phenomena usually separated in scholarship are considered together here: Christian performance of their liturgy, and Muslim recitation of their Qur’an.

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1 Al-Suyuti, *The Perfect Guide to the Sciences of the Qur’an*, trans. Hamid Algar (Reading: Garnet, 2011), 225–31. In contrast, the Franciscan theologian Pierre des Gros (ca. 1464) worried that too much concern with pronunciation could be counterproductive. Pierre des Gros, *Jardin des Nobles*, in BnF MS Fr. 193, fol. 348rv. See Paul Saenger, “Books of Hours and Reading Habits of the Later Middle Ages,” in *The Culture of Print: Power and the Uses of Print in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Roger Chartier, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1989), 144–50; Laura Sterponi, “Reading and Meditation in the Middle Ages: *Lectio divina* and Books of Hours,” *Text & Talk* 28 (2008): 667–89 (671–72), <https://doi.org/10.1515/TEXT.2008.034>

## The Power of Sound

Traditionally, sound had an importance that is not obvious to us moderns. In 1400, the spoken word was generally considered superior to the written. Reading was social and vocal.<sup>2</sup> Before 1300, normally a prayer would be spoken, and even a “silent” prayer would be minimally audible, if not understandable. Prayers were usually not freestyle, but were set texts to be read aloud. Thus, one would “say” the Book of Hours, not “read” it, even if saying the prayers silently. Pierre des Gros explained that vocal prayer was good because of “redundancy”—through it the body externalizes internal devotion, as Jesus said, “the mouth speaks what the heart is full of” (Mt 12:34).<sup>3</sup> Sometimes a theologian, like Pierre d’Ailly (1351–1420), made an attempt to argue that the written word was not inferior, but this was an unusual perspective.<sup>4</sup> In the Islamic world, the belief in the goodness of orality was even stronger. Arabic poets, as well as the Bedouin nomads before Islam, had a strong preference for the oral over the written, which was suspicious and low status. Most Muslims were not fluent Arabic readers, and approached the Qur’an with their ears rather than their eyes.<sup>5</sup>

The priority of the oral over the written can even be seen in the punctuation of the Qur’an, designed to serve pronunciation, not grammar. Punctuation marks conformed as much, if not more, to the pronunciation and oral rhythm as to the syntax of the text itself. A long sentence might be broken up into verses as a kindness to the reciter. The marks were numerous, and their meanings looked to the practice of recitation—as well as to a plain-ken reasoning based on human opinions and human limitations: some pauses were required or prohibited,

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- 2 Alessandro Arcangeli, “Reading Time: The Act of Reading and Early Modern Time Perceptions,” *Journal of Early Modern Studies* 6 (2017): 17–37, <https://doi.org/10.13128/JEMS-2279-7149-20387>; Robert Darnton, “History of Reading,” in *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, ed. Peter Burke (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 1991), 140–67 (150); Steven Roger Fischer, *A History of Reading* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2019), 159–64; Elspeth Jajdelska, *Silent Reading and the Birth of the Narrator* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), <https://doi.org/10.3138/9781442684805>; Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire God: A Study of Monastic Culture* (New York: Fordham UP, 1982), 72–73; Alberto Manguel, *A History of Reading* (New York: Penguin, 1996), 50–51; Paul Saenger, “Silent Reading: Its Impact on Late Medieval Script and Society,” *Viator* 13 (1982): 367–414; Saenger, “Books,” 142–43.
  - 3 Pierre des Gros, *Jardin des Nobles*, fol. 346v.
  - 4 Pierre d’Ailly, *Concepts and Insolubles*, trans. Paul Vincent Spade (Dodrecht: Reidel, 1980), 36.
  - 5 Martin Lings, *Qur’anic Art of Calligraphy and Illumination* (London: Scorpion Publishing, 1987) 11–12; Jane Dammen McAuliffe, “Introduction,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur’an*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2006), 1–20 (6).

while optional ones included signals like “at times the reciter is obliged to pause because of coughing or lack of breath” or the “majority view is that one should pause here.”<sup>6</sup>

## Consonance

The best tool for understanding the deep ken’s approach to music is consonance. As Chapter 2 explains, the deep ken values and attends to consonance, and the plain ken, dissonance. These concepts were also paramount in the fifteenth century. Leon Battista Alberti (1404–72) wrote about beauty as a kind of harmony, “a form of sympathy and consonance of the parts within a body.” His term for beauty, taken from Cicero’s (106–43 BC) theories of rhetoric, is *concinnitas*, which evokes ideas of harmony and proportion, of balanced parts harmonizing into a perfectly integrated whole.<sup>7</sup> Luca Pacioli (d. 1517) listed thirteen qualities of the “divine” ratio of parts to each other or to the whole, in terms of worthiness, uniqueness, and ineffability; his list ended at thirteen to consonate with the number of Jesus and the disciples.<sup>8</sup> One fourteenth-century theorist described the *mixturam suavem* [sweet mixture] of consonance, which could be reached mathematically or vocally.<sup>9</sup> Johannes Tinctoris (d. 1511) stressed the plain-ken particularism involved in appreciating consonance: “Some of these harmonies were suitable, appropriate, and beneficial for different ages and customs. There was not an equal pleasure or estimation of them among all.” Even at the level of the individual, “a relaxed spirit enjoys relaxed harmonies...”<sup>10</sup>

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- 6 Syed Barakat Ahmad, *Introduction to Qur’anic Script* (London: Routledge, 1999), 104–06. See Frederik Leemhuis, “Readings of the Qur’ān,” in *Encyclopedia of the Qur’ān*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe, 5 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2001), IV, 353–54.
  - 7 Leon Battista Alberti, *On the Art of Building in Ten Books*, trans. Joseph Rykwert, Neil Leach, and Robert Tavernor (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 303 (9.5). See Moshe Barasch, *Theories of Art*, 3 vols. (New York: Routledge, 2013), I, 124–25; Robert Tavernor, *On Alberti and the Art of Building* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1998), 43.
  - 8 Luca Pacioli, *Divina proportione*, ed. Constantin Winterberg (Vienna: Carl Graeser, 1889), 58–59.
  - 9 Walter Odington, *De speculatione musice*, in *Scriptorum de musica medii aevi*, ed. Edmond de Coussemaker, 4 vols. (Paris: Durand, 1864), I, 199. See John L. Snyder, “Theinred of Dover on Consonance: A Chapter in the History of Harmony,” *Music Theory Spectrum* 5 (1983): 110–20.
  - 10 Johannes Tinctoris, *Liber de natura et proprietate tonorum*, in *Opera theoretica*, ed. Albert Seay, 2 vols. (Rome: American Institute of Musicology, 1975–78), I, 68–69. See Rob C. Wegman, “Johannes Tinctoris and the Art of Listening,” in *Recevez Ce Mien Petit Labeur: Studies in Renaissance Music in Honour of Ignace Bossuyt*, ed. Mark Delaere and Pieter Bergé (Leuven: Leuven UP, 2008), 279–96.

Today we might think of consonance primarily in term of harmonic music. In the fifteenth century, consonance transcended boundaries. Harmony and proportion created consonance in and between a variety of fields: primarily mathematics and theology, but also textual study, architecture, music, and the visual arts. Alberti was prolific in making links. He compared the harmony among parts of a visual composition with that among phrases, clauses, and sentences of a textual passage. He saw music underlying his architecture, and in one instance worried that with an alteration in a set of pilasters “all that music becomes a discord.”<sup>11</sup> He joined the mathematical, the audio, and the visual: “The very same numbers that cause sounds to have that *concininitas*, pleasing to the ears, can also fill the eyes and mind with wondrous delight.”<sup>12</sup>

In the Far West, theorists continued a longer tradition of linking music, and particularly consonance, with morality. An anonymous ninth-century *Liber enchiridis de arte musica* [Handbook of the Art of Music] notes that the “same guiding principle that controls the concord of pitches regulates the natures of mortals,” for it is through the numerical, audible consonances that “the eternal harmony of life and of the conflicting elements of the whole world is united as one with material things.”<sup>13</sup> Tinctoris explained the ethical potential of music in terms of numerical consonances between earthbound music and the movement of celestial bodies.<sup>14</sup> Carlo Valgulio (1440–98) wrote a preface (proem) to his own Latin translation (1507) of Plutarch’s (d. after 119) *De Musica* [On Music]. He emphasized the morality of music and how that related to consonant intervals: “The essence of music is the movement of the soul, which drives away evils from the soul invaded by confusion.”<sup>15</sup> The Sister Clara of Ostren developed a pedagogical system, to teach the youngest nuns musical notes, which linked each note to a virtue of Jesus.<sup>16</sup> The subtle connections she makes between tone, virtue, and canon are not all clear, but

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- 11 Leon Battista Alberti, *Opere volgari*, ed. Cecil Grayson, 3 vols. (Bari: Gius, Laterza, and Figli, 1973), III, 292.
  - 12 Alberti, *On the Art of Building*, 305 (9.5). See Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988), 135–37.
  - 13 *Musica Enchiridis and Scolica Enchiridis*, ed. Raymond Erickson (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1995), 30–31.
  - 14 Mark Evan Bonds, *Absolute Music: The History of an Idea* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2017), 47–48.
  - 15 Carlo Valgulio, “The Proem on Plutarch’s *Musica* to Titus Pyrrhinus,” in *The Florentine Camerata Translations*, trans. Claude V. Palisca (New Haven, CT: Yale, 1989), 32.
  - 16 Johannes Meyer, *Women’s History in the Age of Reformation: Johannes Meyer’s Chronicle of the Dominican Observance*, trans. Claire Taylor Jones (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2019), 99–100. Note that this is the hexachord, not the diatonic scale.

space seems to be involved: the lowest note evokes humility and the physical lowering required to wash feet, while the highest links to a raising up from the dead, and into heaven. Similarly, Jean Gerson (1363–1429) developed his own system of consonance between music and virtue, and expanded it to include language.

|                        | VOWEL | TONE <sup>17</sup> | VIRTUE                          | SCRIPTURAL REFERENCE   |
|------------------------|-------|--------------------|---------------------------------|--|
| <b>Clara of Ostren</b> |       | ut/do              | humility                        | Incarnation, washing disciples' feet   |
|                        |       | re                 | obedience                       | Jesus's human parents, God at the Crucifixion  |
|                        |       | mi                 | charity /<br>divine love        | Jesus's self-sacrifice   |
|                        |       | fa                 | patience                        | Passion  |
|                        |       | sol                | serenity                        | "willingly and serenely" allowed Crucifixion (despite asking, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?") |
|                        |       | la                 | prudence                        | Resurrection and Ascension (because "each person should swing up above all earthly things")                |
|                        |       |                    |                                 |  |
| <b>Jean Gerson</b>     | U     | do (ut)            | pain ( <i>dolor</i> )           |  |
|                        | E     | re                 | hope ( <i>spes</i> )            |  |
|                        | I     | mi                 | compassion ( <i>compassio</i> ) |  |
|                        |       | fa                 |                                 |  |
|                        | O     | sol                | fear ( <i>timor</i> )           |  |
|                        | A     | la                 | joy ( <i>gaudium</i> )          |  |

Table 18.1 Medieval Music Theories.

Here, text determined music and emotion. Thus, the written note not only fixed the pitch it should be sung *at* but the emotion it should be sung *with*. If the sung syllable had an "a" vowel, it would be sung with the pitch of "la" and with

17 The traditional solmization names of the notes, attributed to the eleventh-century Guido of Arezzo, come from the first syllable of each line of a hymn to John the Baptist, each of which begins on a one-step-higher note: **Ut** queant laxīs / **re**sonāre fibrīs / **Mī**ra gestōrum / **fā**mulī tuōrum... Giovanni Battista Doni (d. 1647) replaced "ut" with "do," the first syllable of *dominus*, on the grounds of easier pronunciation.

the emotion of joy. Note that the (imperfect) deep-ken correspondence between each vowel, the vowel in the name of the note, and one of the vowels in the name of the emotion. For example, *e* = *re* = *spes*. Gerson structured these emotion-notes as a cross: a vertical from *u*/pain up to *a*/joy and a horizontal from *o*/fear on the left to *e*/hope, with *i*/compassion representing Jesus in the middle.<sup>18</sup> Gerson, like Sister Clara, here engineered a deep-ken system by which a rich and deep hidden meaning could be extracted from a restrained melody.

This chapter hears consonance in this narrow sense of two harmonious notes, but also with a panoramic deep ken finds consonance more broadly across music, and beyond. The disparate musical pieces composing a mass sought consonance with each other, and with the liturgical context. A note in a passage of transplanted music allowed consonance between the original and the new. The elevation of speech consonated with the greatness of God's ear.

## Varieties of Jesus Speech and Song

In what contexts would we hear "Jesus" being voiced in this elevated, regulated way?

Beyond personal names, Muslims most often spoke Jesus's name when reciting the Qur'an, where it occurs twenty-five times. Usually, Qur'anic recitation was soloistic, unmeasured, and used an improvised melody. Proper recitation of the Qur'an was only in Arabic.<sup>19</sup> The Qur'an should be recited partially during the five Friday prayers, and completely during the month of Ramadan. Recitation might also happen to mark a death, or the Prophet's birthday, and could occur both in private and public.<sup>20</sup> This modern recording recites surah 61, which mentions misguided people's condemnation of Jesus as a sorcerer (see Audio Clip 1).

18 Jean Gerson, "Collectorium super Magnificat," in OC, VIII, 165–79; Jean Gerson, "Canon ad intellectum monocordi," in OC, IX, 704–05; Jean Gerson, "Ad intelligentiam canticondi," in OC, IX, 714–17. For the application of Gerson's Jesus musical theory to Ockeghem's "My my mass," see Gayle C. Kirkwood, "My my as Theological Allegory," in Johannes Ockeghem, *Masses and Mass Sections*, ed. Jaap van Benthem, 3 vols. (Utrecht: Koninklijke Vereniging voor Nederlandse Muziekgeschiedenis, 1994–2004), III, xiii–xv. For the argument that "my my" refers instead to its being in the Phrygian mode, see Ross W. Duffin, "Mi chiamano Mimi... but My Name is Quarti toni: Solmization and Ockeghem's Famous Mass," *Early Music* 29 (2001): 164–84, <https://doi.org/10.1093/earlyj/XXIX.2.164>

19 Al-Suyuti, *Perfect*, 276.

20 Jan Just Witkam, "Written in Wax: Quranic Recitational Phonography," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 138 (2018): 807–20 (818–19), <https://doi.org/10.7817/jameroriesoci.138.4.0807>



<https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12434/604afd6c>



Audio Clip 1 Recitation of the Qur'an (surah 61), Saad al-Ghamdi, recorded before 2005, Internet Archive, public domain, <https://archive.org/details/Quran-MP3-Ghamdi/061.mp3>

Jesus looms larger in the Christian liturgy, especially in the mass, which in fact celebrates the creation of the blood and body of Jesus. Jesus is central to five of the six textual parts of the mass called "ordinary," as they were mostly identical regardless of the calendar date. The Kyrie begs, "Christ, have mercy" (see Audio Clip 2 and Fig. 18.1). The Gloria repeats this request for mercy, and further asks Jesus, "who takes away the sin of the world," to hear our prayer. The Credo affirms belief in the divinity and sonship of Jesus, as well as his Incarnation, Execution, Resurrection, Ascension, and Future Coming. The Sanctus does not explicitly mention Jesus, but declares that "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." To the deep ken, this reference to the Psalms (118:26) would be a literal reference to Jesus, and that connection is reinforced by the gospels' accounts of bystanders jubilantly quoting this line as Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday (Mt 21:9, Mk 11:9, Lk 19:38, Jn 12:13). The Agnus Dei asks the "Lamb of God," an epithet for Jesus used in Jn 1:29, for mercy and peace. Of the six ordinary parts, only the final, a three-word dismissal, does not reference Jesus. Besides the mass, the second part of the liturgy was the daily office, which annually cycled through the Psalms, with their many literal references to Jesus only visible to the deep ken (see Chapter 11).



<https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12434/f5fc5d1b>



Audio Clip 2 Kyrie 55, Vatican ad lib. VI, Rick Dechance, recorded 25 June 2006, Wikimedia, CC BY-SA 3.0, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kyrie\\_55,\\_Vatican\\_ad\\_lib.\\_VI,\\_Cambrai.ogg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kyrie_55,_Vatican_ad_lib._VI,_Cambrai.ogg)



Ky - ri - e e - lei - son.

Ky - ri - e e - lei - son.

Chris - te e - lei - son.

Chris - te e - lei - son.

Ky - ri - e e - lei - son.

Ky - ri - e e - lei - son.

Ky - ri - e e - lei - son.

Ky - ri - e e - lei - son.

Ky - ri - e e - lei - son.

Fig. 18.1 Kyrie 55, Vatican ad lib. VI, Cambrai, Bibl. Mun. 61 (twelfth century), fol. 155v. Transcription by Christina Hutten, CC BY-NC.

In Christian societies in 1400—and in 1500, and perhaps even in 1600—most trained vocalists earned their living by plainchant, especially the “Gregorian” chant collection traditionally associated with the towering sixth-century Pope Gregory I; three centuries after his death Rome still venerated the whip the Pope used to teach choirboys.<sup>21</sup> In terms of complexity, Christian liturgical

21 Richard Taruskin, *Music from the Earliest Notations to the Sixteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010), 5–6.

music ranged widely from the restrained monophonic plainchant, through its ornamented and elaborated variations, all the way to the splendour of multi-voice polyphony. Most forms of Qur'anic recitation would join plainchant on the restrained side of the spectrum. While English typically talks of Christian "chanting" and Muslim "reciting," both words describe the same action. Spare or exuberant, all these forms followed rules of beauty that spoke to the deep ken.

## Purpose

Why should Muslims recite the Qur'an? Al-Zarkashi (1344–92) advised that a Muslim was obliged to hear and learn the Qur'an, to teach and recite it. He cited a relevant hadith: "The best of you is he who learns and teaches the Qur'an." Al-Zarkashi noted further that one Companion taught that "teaching the Qur'an is a collective duty, and therefore its memorization is incumbent upon the community." Memorization fulfilled that duty, but itself created its own expectations to be especially moral. The Timurid Sultan Ulugh Beg (1394–1449) memorized the Qur'an in all seven variant readings.<sup>22</sup>

Repeated recital aided memorization of the Qur'an, an undertaking which one hadith reported Muhammad comparing to "a camel that is always trying to run away."<sup>23</sup> Al-Askari (d. 1005) described the challenges and rewards of "memorized knowledge," which was "the most difficult and, at the same time, the most useful and rewarding kind of knowledge that swims with you when your ship sinks."<sup>24</sup> Preservation demanded memorization, and further insisted that the memorized text not be recited from memory, which would allow the introduction of errors. According to al-Zarkashi, the eye should follow the written text as the mouth speaks it, working in harmony for a great act of worship.<sup>25</sup> Al-Suyuti, repeating al-Zarkashi's characterization of memorizing the Qur'an as a collective duty for Muslims, noted that the purpose of this is "that it should not cease to be known by a number of people [...] so that it

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22 Anna M. Gade, "Recitation," in *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'ān*, ed. Andrew Rippin (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 481–93 (488); Thomas W. Lentz and Glenn D. Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision: Persian Art and Culture in the Fifteenth Century* (Los Angeles, CA: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1989), 84; Kristina Nelson, *The Art of Reciting the Qur'an* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2009), 53–54.

23 Gade, "Recitation," 487.

24 Franz Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant: The Concept of Knowledge in Medieval Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 282.

25 Nelson, *Art of Reciting*, 60.

can never be altered or corrupted...<sup>26</sup> Memorization thus shored knowledge up against plain-ken degradations of the ideal text.

We err if we think of the Qur'an as a book that serves as a source of information, or merely as a source of authority that can be referred to for the resolution of disputes. Al-Zarkashi understood the Qur'an not merely as something to be read, but rather something to be experienced deeply. It was a tool for the glory of God, and its recital repeated, reaffirmed, recapitulated, and renewed the revelation.<sup>27</sup>

We see this same attitude in statements establishing charitable institutions, the *waqf* endowment documents. Occasional records left funds for the copying of Qur'ans, but the overall pattern indicates that far greater merit came from recitation. The tomb of Safi al-Din Ardabili (1253–1334) in Persia, for example, had a Lantern Hall with an endowment for team-reading of the Qur'an.<sup>28</sup>

In contrast, outside of the Psalms recited in the daily office, Christians encouraged memorization of the Bible less frequently. One argument, for example, held that because Jesus's mother Mary had herself memorized each of his words, there was no need for anyone else to duplicate her work.<sup>29</sup>

If not for text preservation, why did Christians chant? Unlike in a modern concert, the singing was intended for God, not the audience. In the deep ken, the words needed to be sung, not spoken, to achieve a decorum appropriate for that high audience. Singing made speech something more than ordinary since, as one music historian explains, "one does not 'call upon God' in the kind of voice one uses to converse with one's neighbor."<sup>30</sup> Chanting became extraordinary, something more than mere speech.

The Christian chant was independent of the performer, the composer, and the human audience. At least in theory, any audiences heard this music with a deep-ken attention to the cosmic, rather than a plain-ken interest in fleeting human sensibilities. In practice, most chant was sung in settings without a human audience. The performer was not expressing himself or herself through the music, nor was the composer releasing some artistic impulse. Almost all chant was anonymous, and associated with divine origins. They likely considered

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26 Al-Suyuti, *Perfect*, 251.

27 Nelson, *Art of Reciting*, 58–59. See Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 3 vols. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1974), I, 366–69.

28 C. E. Bosworth, X. de Planhol, M. E. Weaver, and M. Medley, "Ardabil," *Encyclopædia Iranica*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater, 16 vols. (London: Routledge, 1985–present), II, fasc. 4, 357–65; David James, *Qur'ans of the Mamlûks* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1988), 125.

29 BodL MS Laud Misc. 200, fol. 193v (re: Lk 2:19).

30 Taruskin, *Music*, 5, 21.

themselves mere channels for transcendental sound, but, as far as we know, they appreciated that the music was non-self. The “performers”—to use a misleading word—were merely instruments rather than authors. There was no real or theoretical sense that the chanter expressed his or her own feelings in the text or music. The repetition of words might remove meaning from them. We are a long way from genius composers and moody guitarists. In the fifteenth century, music was probably not written with the intention of expressing emotion, nor did even theory propose such expression as music’s purpose.<sup>31</sup>

Despite these independences, chant had a dependence on context. The spatial and ritual circumstances of a chant reinforced and deepened its meaning. Today, chant serves as movie soundtracks and “easy-listening” music for students wanting background noise (!) to study with. Such radical re-locations of a music dependent on location amounts to such contradictions that, despite superficial sameness between a chant performed in church and in a recording studio or YouTube video, the two are ontologically different kinds of music. Likely ugly human motivations inflected chant in 1400 as well, but chant designed for God was still designed for God even if it also flattered a listening pope.<sup>32</sup>

Some theorists in 1400 described the music humans made and heard as an audible expression of, or even a metaphor for, the true, divine music beyond the range of our ears or understanding. Although human music was not expressive of performer, composer, or even text, it did express something far more sublime—Music itself. Human music was an echo of the divine. Augustine (354–430) and Boethius (ca. 480–524) remained the foundation of ideas of music around 1400. They, drawing on an undeveloped (so pre-skeptical) and hyperdeveloped (neo-platonic) academic Platonic aesthetics, saw the value of music not in itself, not in its own beauty, but because it resonated (so to speak) with divine beauty. Theorists wrote on *musica speculativa*, music that audibly reflected (so to speak) the Real—*speculativa*, derived from *speculum*, meaning mirror. This resonance and reflection gave it a sublime quality. The simple consonance between two notes reflected the deep order of the universe. The music one could hear could serve, though roughly, as a metaphor for Music, for cosmic and human harmony.<sup>33</sup> Chant resonated in the deep-ken ear.

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31 Bonnie J. Blackburn, “For whom do the singers sing?” *Early Music* 25 (1997): 593–610, <https://doi.org/10.1093/earlyj/XXV.4.593>; David Hiley, *Gregorian Chant* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2009), 3–4, 158.

32 Richard H. Hoppin, *Medieval Music* (New York: Norton, 1978), 91.

33 Taruskin, *Music*, 70.

## The Rules of Restraint

In general, a common thread across the chant of both subcults was restraint. Their chanters restrained themselves for different reasons. In Islam, the explicit motivations for restraint focused on communicating meaning to a human audience, a typical priority for the plain ken. Sometimes, Christians had a similar motivation: the Council of Basel called chants to be recited “not in a mumble or between their teeth, nor swallowing or abbreviating their words, nor intermingling conversation and laughter, but [...] reverently and distinctly.”<sup>34</sup> In most Christian theoretical writings, however, as the audience was often understood to be divine, the goal was the kind of beauty valued in a more deep-ken perspective.

The set of rules for intoning the Qur’an is called *tajwid*. Al-Suyuti explained that “*tajwid* is the adornment of recitation. It consists of giving the letters their due and their proper order, and pronouncing each letter from its point of articulation and its source, and pronouncing it gently, in its perfect form...”<sup>35</sup> Throughout our period there were short, popular, rhymed manuals of *tajwid*, probably intended for beginners, as they were too terse to make sense without a teacher’s commentary, such as that by the Syrian Ibn al-Jazari (1350–1429) (in 107 verses).<sup>36</sup>

The key to proper *tajwid* was restraint. Al-Suyuti urged recitation “without excess, exaggeration or affectation.”<sup>37</sup> Al-Jazari went into greater detail on how not to chant: “*Tajwid* is not slurring of the tongue, nor hollowing of the mouth [so as to make deep tones], nor twisting of the jaw, nor quavering of the voice, nor lengthening of the doubled consonants, nor cutting short the lengthened vowels, nor buzzing the nasals, nor slurring the r’s.” Indeed, the ideal chant, “with no inaccuracy, nor affectation, nor manneredness, nor extravagance,” actively “shuns these impressions and the hearts and ears reject them.”<sup>38</sup>

Al-Jazari noted that restraint was also a limitation against going beyond Arabic’s nature (see Chapter 10). Recite, he advised, with “no straying from the natural hallmarks of the Arabs, and the speech of the truly eloquent and

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34 *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, ed. Norman P. Tanner, 2 vols. (London: Sheed and Ward, 1990), I, 490–91.

35 Al-Suyuti, *Perfect*, 253.

36 Frederick M. Denny, “Quran Recitation: A Tradition of Oral Performance and Transmission,” *Oral Tradition* 4 (1989): 5–26 (17–18).

37 Al-Suyuti, *Perfect*, 253.

38 Frederick M. Denny, “Exegesis and Recitation: Their Development as Classical Forms of Qur’anic Piety,” in *Transitions and Transformations in the History of Religions: Essays in Honor of Joseph M. Kitagawa*, ed. Frank E. Reynolds and Theodore M. Ludwig (Leiden: Brill, 1980), 91–123 (121).

pure with respect to the 'readings' and accepted performance." This followed a long tradition. Recitation should be done, said the Companion Ibn Mas'ud in one hadith, in a specifically Arabic way: "Render beautifully [with *tajwid*] the recitation of the Qur'an and adorn it with the best of voices and give it Arabic inflection, for indeed it is Arabic and God loves it to be inflected in the pure Arabic manner."<sup>39</sup>

Restraint could also entail a slow speed. We find more positive descriptions of recitation clustered around the term *tartil*. Roughly a synonym with *tajwid*, *tartil* sometimes had the sense of being even less ostentatious. The Qur'an itself (73:4) admonished the faithful to "recite the Qur'an with *tartil*." For al-Zarkashi, this kind of recitation required that the speaker intone at a speed that allowed appreciation of each word's meaning. He identified low-level, but admirable, *tartil* as speaking "in a grand manner" and keeping each "letter distinct."<sup>40</sup> Speed should not detract from the recitation's clarity. Quoting Ibn Mas'ud, al-Suyuti also recommended a slow speed and enough care to preserve and express meaning: "Do not shake as one shakes a palm full of dates." Even a non-native speaker who does not understand the Qur'an should speak at a slow speed, as a demonstration of a worshipful attitude and as more salutary for the audience.<sup>41</sup>

Some deviation from slow was allowed. A reciter who gave a meaningful recitation could recite at any speed. Al-Zarkashi pointed out that the varying particular strengths of the reciter, such as fervour or concentration, made it necessary to authorize varying speeds, again always to preserve meaning. He urged that the reciter's "heart must be occupied in contemplating the meaning of what his tongue expresses, for he must know the meaning of each verse." Thus, attentive to meaning, the reciter will have "achieved complete *tartil*."<sup>42</sup>

How fast was slow? Some theorists had a deep-ken interest in how quickly the Qur'an *should* be recited. According to al-Zarkashi, it should be recited in a single night, as the Caliph Uthman (ca. 573–656) did, especially during Ramadan. Hadith reported that Muhammad thought the complete text should take at least three days. Reading the text multiple times multiplied the deep-ken power gained from such piety. Shifting to a more plain-ken perspective that maximized rather than optimized, others evinced greater interest in how

39 Denny, "Exegesis," 117, 121.

40 Denny, "Exegesis," 96; Nelson, *Art of Reciting*, 85–86.

41 Al-Suyuti, *Le parfait manuel des sciences coraniques al-Itqān fi 'ulūm al-Qur'ān de Ğalāl ad-Dīn as-Suyūṭī (849/1445–911/1505)*, trans. Michel Lagarde (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 1296 (80.3), <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004357112>. Speed was such an important attribute of recitations that it became a primary criterion for their classification, and specific terms developed to indicate specific speeds. See Gade, "Recitation," 487.

42 Quoted in Nelson, *Art of Reciting*, 60, 85–86.

quickly it *could* be recited. Al-Suyuti noted that the record was eight complete recitals in a twenty-four-hour day. The Mughal Emperor Babur (1483–1530) found inspiration here to calculate that one could recite the *bismillah* and the *fatihah* (the short opening surah of the Qur'an) 8,640 times in 24 hours (and could blink 216,000 times in the same period).<sup>43</sup>

The importance of meaning feeds into a new question, of loudness. Al-Suyuti followed hadith in distinguishing between two volumes of recitation, with the voice audible and with the voice inaudible. Neither was obviously superior. Some liked to vary between the two to avoid fatigue and tedium. Certainly, the audible recitation was of greater advantage to listeners. The inaudible recitation, on the other hand, avoided the danger of impious pride, just as charity was best done secretly. Al-Zarkashi thus concluded that inaudible recitation was better for prayer rituals and for day-time recitations, since under those circumstances the reciter was more likely to take dangerous pride in his abilities.<sup>44</sup>

The reciter should express with his voice the proper feeling for the meaning of the various passages, a gentle voice in the encouraging passages, a severe voice for the reprimands. For al-Zakarshi, *tartil* could also adapt the recitation to the emotional flavour of the text: "If one recites a passage containing a threat, one does so in a threatening manner, and if one recites a passage glorifying God, one does so in a glorifying manner." One hadith gave the Prophet's standard for beauty in recitation, the voice of the reciter whom "when you hear him recite" you understand "that he fears God." Especially in the first third of our period, sorrow was an important attendant on meaning. Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406) reminded his readers that the Qur'an was "something that causes awe [*khushu'*], as it reminds [man] of death and what comes after it. It is not an occasion to give pleasure in the perception of beautiful sounds."<sup>45</sup> Al-Suyuti drew on a long tradition of, but gave his own fresh emphasis on, the need to recite with sorrow [*huzn*]. "The best reciter," he advised, "is the one who, when reciting it, becomes sad." Because this was a recapitulation of the original revelation, sorrow in the

43 Al-Suyuti, *Le parfait manuel*, 369 (35.1). See Nelson, *Art of Reciting*, 59–60; Stephen F. Dale, *The Garden of the Eight Paradises: Babur and the Culture of Empire in Central Asia, Afghanistan, and India (1483–1530)* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 59, <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047413141>

44 Al-Suyuti, *Le parfait manuel*, 381 (35.16). See Nelson, *Art of Reciting*, 60–62, 70; Frederick M. Denny, "Qur'anic Recitation," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World*, ed. John L. Esposito, 6 vols. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009), III, 400–04. Gade, "Recitation," 490 notes Al-Ghazali worried about a reciter's skill interfering with the main act of recapitulating divine revelation.

45 Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, trans. Franz Rosenthal, 3 vols. (New York: Pantheon, 1958), II, 400 (ch. 5, sec. 31). See Denny, "Exegesis," 96; Nelson, *Art of Reciting*, 85–86.

recitation should consonate with the sorrow of the Qur'an's descent. For those who could not cry, al-Suyuti had suggestions: you could force tears. You could reflect on its content as a way of intimidating yourself. You could reflect on your inability to cry as itself a tragedy that should prompt weeping.<sup>46</sup> This concern for the emotional states of the reciter (modesty, sorrow) and of the audience (awed) reflects a deep-ken understanding by which meaning depends on context.

Another concern for al-Suyuti was that musical tunes had entered recitation, and some recitation happened with melodic modes. Both he and Ibn Khaldun held that such musicalization was acceptable only if it in no way interfered with the *tajwid* guidelines.<sup>47</sup> In part, this allowance was justified by reports that the Prophet, when he himself was reciting, decorated the recitation with prolongation. Muhammad's recitation, according to one popular hadith, was careful and clear, conducted "letter by letter." Ibn Khaldun cited a hadith in which Muhammad likened a Qur'an reciter to "a flute of those belonging to the family of David," but noted this was not a reference to musicality, but "refers to a beautiful voice, a clear pronunciation in reciting the Qur'an, and a clear distinction in the articulation and enunciation of the letters." He condemned those who "know well how to modulate their voices, as if they were flutes. They thus cause emotion through the beauty of their performance and the harmony of their modes." His caution worried that a musicalized Qur'an might create a distracting beauty rather than a concentrating awe. Thus, fancy music was prohibited, but modulation and cadence were begrudgingly allowed.<sup>48</sup>

Christian chant, to a degree, shared this Muslim esteem for restraint. In part, necessity was the mother of restraint: few churches could afford an organ, and a poor parish could not maintain a well-trained, well-equipped musical ensemble. To the extent it was voluntary, restraint created a beauty that reflected the divinity of the audience. Chant has its origins in asceticism, and was still in 1400 linked to the monastic life, which shared with chant an appreciation for restraint.<sup>49</sup> This restraint reflects and promotes deep-ken values. In contrast, art criticism today celebrates expansion, innovation, and provocation, with little interest in recovering essential and holistic beauty and truth. Unlike today, where art is only considered true art when it pushes limits, in a traditional world the art lay inside and within the limits themselves. Art by its nature had restraints.

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46 Al-Suyuti, *Le parfait manuel*, 379 (35.13); Denny, "Qur'anic"; Nelson, *Art of Reciting*, 90–91, 97–98.

47 Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, II, 399–400 (ch. 5, sec. 31).

48 Al-Suyuti, *Le parfait manuel*, 375 (35.10), 378 (35.11), 380 (35.14); Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, II, 399–401 (ch. 5, sec. 31). See Shehadi, *Philosophies of Music*, 151.

49 Taruskin, *Music*, 9.



Liturgical chant's first restraint restrains timbre, by including only sounds made by the human voice. Since instruments have different timbres, the unity of timbre is achieved through chant being performed *a capella*. To find the best way to express the divine music, Christians turned to their Bible, and found passages like Ps 150:3–5, which reverberates with sound:

Praise Him with the sound of the trumpet;  
 Praise Him with the lute and harp!  
 Praise Him with the timbrel and dance;  
 Praise Him with stringed instruments and flutes!  
 Praise Him with loud cymbals;  
 Praise Him with clashing cymbals

Christians knew their canon was obviously true, and that the best music was restrained in timbre, and so they concluded that this canonical music full of instruments was merely a metaphor. They, then, would praise God with loud and clashing cymbals quietly and without any instruments. Chant's timbre would neither darken nor brighten beyond the range of the human voice. The following verse, Ps 150:6, indeed, returns to a more literal emphasis on breathing to trump the previous verses: "Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD!" The Orthodox used this verse in particular to exclude instruments from their own liturgy: unlike humans, cymbals did not have souls—do not "breathe"—and therefore were not appropriate for formal Jesus music.<sup>50</sup>

Chant's second restraint restrains voices to a unity of pitch. That is, normally chant restrains its singers onto the same notes, *quasi una voce*, as if a single voice. This is monophony, music with once voice. No matter how many singers chant, they are all essentially chanting the same note, perhaps an octave apart to accommodate voices of varying ages and sexes. As the previous restraint excludes everything beyond human voices, and this restraint unifies all those human voices into one, ears recognize in chant a powerful unity and simplicity.

We have inhaled enough Enlightenment Fairy Dust that we have a sense of progress, and if long ago people sang monophonically, it is easy to accept that it was because they were not advanced enough to have alternatives. Many histories of Western music begin with this simple monophonic music, and in a later chapter introduce more complex polyphonic music, with multiple independent voices, as a forward step of progress—but our chanters in 1400 were capable of polyphonic chant. The co-existence of polyphonic and monophonic

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<sup>50</sup> In the fifteenth century, a wealthy church might supplement the human voice with an organ or tuba marina. Christian music became loud and instrumental again with the Reformation, just when some scholars were turning away from the allegorization of the Bible.

music indicates that the latter was a conscious choice made to participate in the beauty of restraint, through the understanding of an essential truth to music.<sup>51</sup> As a bonus, it also created a disciplined community. This has strong deep-ken resonance, as the unison of many voices is the ultimate consonance, and those voices are singing the same texts. They become a unified One.

Chant's third restraint restrains that "one" human voice from sounding certain pitches. Pitch is a continuum, and the gap between notes can be very small, essentially limited only by your instrument and your skill. Impressive and fundamental was the octave. A string and another string half its size produce together two notes that sound especially consonant. For the scholar Marsilio Ficino (1433–99), the regularity of the octave suggested a round shape, specifically a kind of oval, as in the mouth and the ear.<sup>52</sup> Within the octave, notes were chosen in a fixed pattern that maximized the harmony between them, including interval combinations called the perfect fourth and perfect fifth, respectively sounding the 3:2 and 4:3 ratio of strings. The melody usually moved among the most consonant intermediary notes, plus the octave, creating patterns.

Those melodic patterns (which notes were played most frequently? which most significantly?) were used to classify chants into different "modes." These were distinctive to contemporary ears and created a kind of tonal vocabulary. These modes proved useful in coordinating the weekly cycle of Old Testament psalms with the annual cycle centred around Jesus. Each day of the Church calendar specified chants called "antiphons" for the office, to precede and follow the day's psalms. The text of an antiphon might be a single verse plucked out of a psalm and repurposed to allude to the day's feast. Books called tonaries sorted antiphons into modes, and learning an antiphon probably meant learning its mode classification as well. That classification allowed the psalms and antiphons to coordinate musically.<sup>53</sup> In a sense, then, music theory in the Far West began as

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51 Taruskin, *Music*, 44.

52 Marsilio Ficino, *The Letters of Marsilio Ficino*, 10 vols. (London: Shephard-Walwyn, 2003), VII, 82–87; Edward E. Lowinsky, "The Concept of Physical and Musical Space in the Renaissance (A Preliminary Sketch)," in *Music in the Culture of the Renaissance and Other Essays*, ed. Bonnie J. Blackburn, 2 vols. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1989), I, 6–18 (15–16).

53 For example, in the Roman use Ps 138 was sung on Vespers on Thursday. The antiphon *Confortatus est* was one of several often assigned to it. *Confortatus est* is in mode 7, which motivated singing the psalm in the seventh psalm tone. At the end of the verse, the choirmaster would choose one of three cadences, based on what fit best the repeated antiphon after the psalm was finally over. *Confortatus est* begins on C, so we would choose the ending that ends on C. See Hiley, *Gregorian*, 4, 45–50, 169; Hoppin, *Medieval Music*, 68, 72; Taruskin, *Music*, 22, 72.

a way to link the Hebrew psalms to the Christian calendar—a problem parallel to finding implicit references to Jesus in the text of the Old Testament.

Finally, chant also retrained itself from extreme pitches, the high and low ranges of the pitch continuum. Psalm verses and lesser doxology have very narrow range; antiphons range more widely. The lowest and highest notes of a typical chant might be a fifth apart.<sup>54</sup> In comparison, “Happy Birthday to You” has a range of an octave, and Queen’s “Bohemian Rhapsody” stretches across three octaves.

## The Possibilities of Exuberance

### Ornamented Chant

Sometimes, restraint was not enough. Reflecting the dominance of the plain ken in Muslim chant, communication was key; the historical record mostly reports authorities condemning exuberance as detrimental to clear expression. The repetition of such condemnations suggests that actual recitations continued to be less restrained than the norms desired. For the Christian subcult, in contrast, the audience was God, who could enjoy exuberance just as much as restraint.

In Islam, fancy ornamentation, potentially problematic for its interference with clarity, was associated with animals and unbelievers. One kind of decoration was the *tarji`*, apparently some kind of trill. One fourteenth-century writer defined it as the sound of a rider whose voice was periodically interrupted by his jiggling mount. Ibn Khaldun historicized this by saying that the *tarji`* first appeared among Arabic caravan songs. He, too, saw the inspiration in the rhythmic gait of the camel to encourage recitation with *tarannum*,<sup>55</sup> an obscure term linked to the twang of an archer’s bow, the cooing of a dove, and the chirp of a locust. Others, including the thirteenth-century al-Qurtubi, compared it to the noise not of camels, but of Christians: it was the imitation of the Christian style of recitation using repeated phonemes<sup>56</sup>—presumably melismatic chant (see below). Al-Turtusi (d. ca. 1100) in his description of this innovation mentioned a musicalization called *al-rahab* [monastic] in which every Qur’anic passage referencing Jesus was said in a Christian accent, in imitation of how Christians

54 Nigel Nettheim, “On the Accuracy of Musical Data, with Examples from Gregorian Chant and German Folksong,” *Computers and Humanities* 27 (1993): 111–20.

55 Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, II, 402–03 (ch. 5, sec. 31).

56 Al-Suyuti, *Le parfait manuel*, 380 (35.14). See Edward William Lane, “ترنم,” in *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, ed. Edward William Lane, 8 vols. (Beirut: Liban, 1968), III, 1166.

sounded. In the eleventh century, al-Bayhaqi (994–1066) collected a hadith advising reciters to steer clear of the “tunes of the love poets and the airs of” Christians and Jews. The fifteenth-century poet Jami (see Chapter 20) exhorted his audience to “Go, dwell in a monastery, among those whom Jesus inspires.”<sup>57</sup> Thus, in Islam exuberance was particularly associated with Christianity.

In the Christian subcult’s plainchant, moments of exuberance break forth, and sound all the more exuberant for the restraint of their restrained backdrop. A chant might increase the range of pitches. One study of 10,592 chants found that while most kept within the typical range of a fifth, a small minority were more daring: 6% used the full octave, and 3% an even wider range. Chants were classified according to the style of their text setting—syllabic (predominantly one pitch per syllable), neumatic (predominantly two or three pitches per syllable), and melismatic (containing long passages of music sung to a single syllable). A melisma might even have two dozen notes on a single syllable: Alleluia <sup>a</sup> a <sup>a</sup> a <sup>a</sup> a <sup>a</sup> a <sup>a</sup> a. In chant, melismas rarely featured pattern repetition—we cannot anticipate that the highest or lowest note would be in the middle—and after any note one would not be able to predict the next. In the mass, the sections with the most text (the Credo, the Gloria) would typically have the least melismatic adornment, and the section with the least text (the Kyrie) would have the most. The melisma had little connection between the words and the melody, in the plain-ken sense of emphasizing key words, unlike the arias that would later come with opera.<sup>58</sup> Mostly, a melisma expressed an exuberance, as at key moments linked to the gospel reading and the Eucharist. Augustine called them the “sound of joy without words.”<sup>59</sup>

That exuberant melisma could even be drawn out to include a whole new melody, perhaps repeated. Adding new words to this new melody created what is called a “sequence” or a “trope.” Take an existing chant and expand it by adding new words or new notes before or between the chant, extending or adding melismas, or filling in melismas with text. Music had priority: it was more common to fill in music with text than to fill in text with music. This also

57 Denny, “Qur’anic”; Javad Nurbakhsh, *Jesus in the Eyes of the Sufis* (London: Khaniqahi-Nimatullahi, 2012), 46; Mohamed Talbi, “La qirā’a bi-l-ahḥān,” *Arabica* 5.2 (1958): 183–90 (183–84).

58 Richard L. Crocker, *An Introduction to Gregorian Chant* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2000), 62; Hiley, *Gregorian*, 43, 67, 165; Nettheim, “On the Accuracy of Musical Data,” 114. In contrast, office hymns had freer melodies, climbing by seconds and thirds to a peak, and then falling in a cadence—a typical Western melody even today.

59 Augustine of Hippo, *Expositions on the Book of Psalms*, ed. Philip Schaff (New York: Christian Literature, 1905), 488; Latin original at Augustine of Hippo, *Opera Omnia IV*, in *Patrologia Latina*, ed. J.-P. Migne, 217 vols. (Paris: Fratres Garnier, 1865), XXXVII, col. 1272.

expanded, or restricted, the meaning of the original text, as the new words rubbed shoulders with the old ones.<sup>60</sup> Mass IV of the Liber Usualis, one of the most popular Gregorian masses, is known as *Missa Cunctipotens Genitor* because of the trope of its Kyrie (see Fig. 18.2).

Ky-ri - e - - - - e - - - - le - i - son,

Chri - ste - - - - e - - - - le - i - son.

**Trope**

Cunc-ti - po-tens Ge-ni - tor, De - us, om - ni-um cre - a - tor, e - - - - le - i - son.

Chri - ste, De - i for - ma, vir - tus Pa - tris - que so - phi - a, e - - - - le - i - son.

Fig. 18.2 Mass IV of the Liber Usualis (Kyrie Cunctipotens Genitor). Transcription by Christina Hutten, CC BY-NC.

Some sequences and tropes may have sounded once or twice before disappearing forever, but a successful one would take root in the local liturgy, spread beyond the local, and perhaps even find a home in the “universal” liturgy. As this process settled, “sequence” came to refer specifically to the drawn-out melodies that flowed from the alleluia’s final melisma in the mass, sung only on particularly important feast days. Typically, verses would come after the alleluiaaaaaaaa melisma, which would be repeated after them. These sequences were syllabic.<sup>61</sup>

Repetition—of melody, of texts, of responses—can also be seen as an exuberance in its multiplication. The same pitch could be repeated, creating resonance (like pushing a swing) and reverberation: it bounced off walls, perhaps with a four-second delay, especially if it matches the building’s own reciting-pitch frequency. Reverberation reinforced resonance by the magnification of overtones. The repeated pitch also created a memory in the ear (“temporary pitch memory”) that might last an hour or more. Short melodic formulas (“idioms”) could also be repeated.<sup>62</sup>

60 Hiley, *Western*, 172–236.

61 Hiley, *Gregorian*, 121–22, 127–36.

62 Crocker, *An Introduction*, 26–32, 54–55.

Thus, in Christian chant there was a continuum between the restrained and the ornate. On the spare side, we have greater clarity—with a one-to-one correspondence between notes and syllables—found especially in simple hymns and antiphons, prosulas, and sequences (because they add text to textless notes). On the ornate side, we have greater solemnity—with one syllable given multiple notes (melisma)—found especially in the Great Responsories (office) and gradual, tract, and offertory sections of mass. Multiple voices could be improvised to enrich a normally monophonic chant on high feast days. Where a passage of chant was located on this continuum would consonate with where it was located in the larger music, and where it was located in the Church year: the more awesome was appropriate for awesome occasions.<sup>63</sup>

In plainchant, musical exuberance was often independent of the chanted words. One formula of melody could be used for multiple verses of a single text, or for wholly different texts. A decorative melisma might make an offertory more awesome, but that melisma was more likely to reflect the awesomeness of chant in general, rather than any specific textual passage. Some passages appear to have “word painting,” where the melody reflected the text, such as the gradual *Ecce quam bonum*’s inclusion of “a cup of fine oil that overflows and runs down the beard of Aaron” matched with a long sustained descent in the melody. It is difficult to be conclusive, but many scholars are inclined to believe that these are just coincidence.<sup>64</sup>

## Polyphony

One Saturday in 1400, between noon and three o’clock, four voices, *simultaneously*, before a side altar in Reims Cathedral vocalized some of the prayer, the meaning and some of the words. While in a moment of exuberance, plainchant might use dozens of notes to sing the single word “Christ,” here, among the four voices, a total of 228 notes came together in one sung “Christ.” This was the *Messe de Notre Dame* (see Audio Clip 3 and Fig. 18.3). It was composed by Guillaume de Machaut (ca. 1300–77), probably in the 1360s. When his brother died, Machaut made this a memorial mass, and it continued to be performed even after the composer’s own death. The memorial intentions established by his will were honoured, though not with the intended music, into the eighteenth century.<sup>65</sup>

63 Hiley, *Gregorian*, 42–43.

64 Crocker, *An Introduction*, 62; Hiley, *Gregorian*, 69; Hoppin, *Medieval Music*, 90.

65 Anne Walters Robertson, *Guillaume de Machaut and Reims: Context and Meaning in His Musical Works* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2002), 257–75; Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, *Machaut’s Mass: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990).



<https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12434/6e1135ef>



Audio Clip 3 Guillaume de Machaut, Gloria from the *Messe de Nostre Dame* (before 1365), The Gesualdo Six, recorded at Ely Cathedral, February 2018. All rights reserved. For the performance video, see Ely Cathedral, “Gloria from La Messe de Nostre Dame (Machaut) The Gesualdo Six at Ely Cathedral,” online video recording, YouTube (1 April 2018), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xIBYfdSH9GI>

Triplum  
Et in ter - ra pax

Motetus  
Et in ter - ra pax

Tenor  
Et in ter - ra pax

Contratenor  
Et in ter - ra pax

T  
ho - mi - ni - bus bo - ne vo -

M  
ho - mi - ni - bus bo - ne vo -

T  
ho - mi - ni - bus bo - ne vo -

C  
ho - mi - ni - bus bo - ne vo -

T  
lun - ta - tis; Lau - da - mus te; Be - ne - di - ci - mus te;

M  
lun - ta - tis; Lau - da - mus te; Be - ne - di - ci - mus te;

T  
lun - ta - tis; Lau - da - mus te; Be - ne - di - ci - mus te;

C  
lun - ta - tis; Lau - da - mus te; Be - ne - di - ci - mus te;

The image displays a musical score for a Gloria by Guillaume de Machaut, featuring four voices: Tenor (T), Alto (M), Tenor (T), and Contralto (C). The score is divided into three systems, each with four staves. The lyrics are in Latin and are written below the notes. The first system (measures 13-15) has the lyrics: "A - do - ra - mus te; Glo - ri - fi - ca - mus te;". The second system (measures 20-22) has the lyrics: "Gra - ci - as a - gi - mus ti - bi pro - pter". The third system (measures 26-28) has the lyrics: "ma - gnam glo - ri - am tu - am,". The notation includes treble clefs, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a time signature of 3/8. The lyrics are written in a Gothic-style font.

Fig. 18.3 Guillaume de Machaut, Gloria from the *Messe de Notre Dame* (before 1365). Transcription by Christina Hutten, CC BY-NC.

Polyphonic music is made up of multiple voices that are partially independent. One voice does not follow another lockstep at a perfect octave, nor does it pick its own path oblivious to the others. Polyphony's meaningful complexity immediately contrasts with monophonic chant's restraint. Polyphony creates a sonic depth well suited for the deep ken's ear.

The idea that polyphony is a late invention of the Far West is not true. As far as our evidence allows us to see, polyphonic chant was as old as chant itself. Around the world, voices joined together simultaneously to create music.



Probably, much performed music had been polyphonic, even if not written down as such. What was unique to the Far West was polyphony that was composed, not improvised, and was therefore repeatable. Composed polyphony began around the twelfth century in the Far West and remained, for centuries afterwards, a distinctive feature of that region's music. This also gave an importance to the composer, an emphasis unknown in other regions.<sup>66</sup>

Still, in 1400, most music even in the Far West was monophonic. Perhaps this was because monophony was easier to sing, or because its unmatched clarity and expressive force found favour among Church elites. The more cautious Franciscans preferred a chant that focused hearers' attention over a polyphony that scattered attention across multiple voices and across the multiple books needed to contain compositions too complex for memorization. Well into the fifteenth century, most Europeans were not listening to fancy music, and even a cutting-edge composer like Guillaume Du Fay (ca. 1397–1474) was still writing monophonic chants. While Bourges Cathedral insisted upon polyphony, at Notre Dame, just 200 km north, it was outlawed. Even if we restrict the question to composed works, most new music in Central Europe, and maybe also in Iberia and Italy, remained monophonic. In Italy, polyphony was more improvised than composed; in Germany, it was avoided except for the rare occasions that called for exuberance. Only in the Far West's northwest was polyphony more rule than exception.<sup>67</sup>

The result was a powerful sonic experience that impressed contemporaries for being as far from normal, unelevated speech as possible. That contrast underlay the irony in the assertion by the Dominican theologian Bartholomaeus Rimbartinus (d. 1466) that Jesus was able to speak and sing polyphony simultaneously. His only proof of this assertion was that it was impossible, and, as Jesus himself explained (Lk 18:27), "What is impossible with man is possible with God."<sup>68</sup> Nicholas of Cusa (1401–64), following an older tradition reaching back to Boethius, held polyphony as so complex as to be partially inaccessible to

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66 Hoppin, *Medieval Music*, 187; Albert Seay, *Music in the Medieval World* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1975), 72; Taruskin, *Music*, 2, 499, 542.

67 Hiley, *Gregorian*, 154; Deborah Howard, "Architecture and Music in Fifteenth-century Italy," in *Cambridge History of Fifteenth-Century Music*, ed. Anna Maria Busse Berger and Jesse Rodin (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2015), 333–60 (336–37), <https://doi.org/10.1017/cho9781139057813.026>; Seay, *Music in the Medieval World*, 150; Richard Sherr, "Plainsong in the Age of Polyphony," in *Cambridge History of Fifteenth-Century Music*, ed. Anna Maria Busse Berger and Jesse Rodin (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2015), 771–84 (780–81), <https://doi.org/10.1017/cho9781139057813.053>; Taruskin, *Music*, 454.

68 Bartholomeus Rimbartinus, *De deliciis sensibilibus paradisi* (Venice: n.p., 1498), 31v.

animals, who could enjoy polyphony, but could not understand their enjoyment, because of their inability to do math.<sup>69</sup>

Polyphony had consequences. How could the melodies of different voices integrate with each other? Coordinating multiple voices required composers to reconsider rhythm, the relationship between text and the music, and the expansion of the limited tonal range inherited from monophonic chant.

Rhythm is supremely useful for coordinating voices. In the thirteenth century, the idea developed that a long unit of musical time was composed of three short (“breves”) subunits. This, to the deep ken, reflected the Trinity, as well as the philosophical belief that time necessarily has three parts, a beginning, a middle, and an end. Division by two, in contrast, was imperfect.<sup>70</sup>

The fourteenth century witnessed new composing possibilities, called “Ars Nova” [New Art]. Ostentatiously clever, its composers were painfully aware that they were doing something new. In terms of rhythm, the Ars Nova expanded the perfect. Johannes de Muris (early fourteenth century) and Nicole Oresme (ca. 1320/25–82) broadened rhythmic possibilities by bridging between the “sensible” music of experience and the “speculative” music of reason. They developed what were essentially integral exponents  $3^x \times 2^y$ , for all  $x$  and  $y$ , where the sums of  $x$  and  $y$  are greater than 0 and less than 5.

|                  |                  |                  |                  |          |    |    |    |    |
|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|----------|----|----|----|----|
| $3^1 \times 2^0$ | $3^2 \times 2^0$ | $3^3 \times 2^0$ | $3^4 \times 2^0$ |          | 3  | 9  | 27 | 81 |
| $3^1 \times 2^1$ | $3^2 \times 2^1$ | $3^3 \times 2^1$ |                  | that is, | 6  | 18 | 54 |    |
| $3^1 \times 2^2$ | $3^2 \times 2^2$ |                  |                  |          | 12 | 36 |    |    |
| $3^1 \times 2^3$ |                  |                  |                  |          | 24 |    |    |    |

... were all now perfect, because in their composition any imperfection from the two was subsumed into the perfection of the three. Oresme and the Trinity thus helped bridge the gap between what musical notation accepted and what dance music executed. What had been perfect only in theory could now achieve perfection in practice; anything sung could now be written. Experiments with complex polyrhythms around 1400 sparked concern that music would be perfected, for the deep ken, to such an extent that time itself would end, with the apocalypse and the return of Jesus.<sup>71</sup>

69 Nicholas of Cusa, *De Ludo Globi (The Bowling-Game)*, trans. Jasper Hopkins (Minneapolis, MN: Banning, 2000), 1229–30 (2.90).

70 Dorit E. Tanay, “Jehan De Meur’s Musical Theory and the Mathematics of the Fourteenth Century,” *Tractrix* 5 (1993): 17–43 (22).

71 Johannes de Muris, *Notitia artis musicae et Compendium musicae practicae*, ed. Ulrich Michels (Rome: American Institute of Musicology, 1972), 69, 84, 94–96; Oresme, *Le Livre de Politiques d’Aristote*, ed. Albert Douglas Menut, *Transactions of the American*

## *Cantus firmus* and Deep Meaning

In the Far West, the fifteenth century's major innovation in the most highly learned Jesus music was virtuoso use of the *cantus firmus* (CF) to explore new dimensions of complexity and depth in creating polyphony. The basic CF technique was simple, and had been in use for centuries: take any pre-existing melody and press it into service as the basis for a new piece of polyphony. The idea of a composer finding inspiration in nature or in his own genius was not a good fit for this period. Composers looked to tradition, not to invention; a stylish composer would recycle music already in existence. Often the source music was chant, which could be selected for consonance with the liturgical context, to build on an overall consonance with authority and the past. The composer would then use that preexisting melody as the musical heart for his new polyphonic composition. The CF was a way of unifying, through non-innovative, pre-existing sources, the diversity of polyphony.

The range of possible sources for CF was broad. A CF could be taken from liturgical chants, other sacred music, or even secular music. Equally impressive is how the source material was used, especially the high level of abstraction. Melody was abstracted from the rhythm, and pitch from the melody, which created a unity that abstracted the ordinary cycle from the ordinary. What was the motivation? It could be aesthetic. It could be a way to link the unchanging ordinary to specific occasions. It could treat the original source music as having meaning that was symbolic, mathematical, allegorical, and oriented towards the deep ken, meaning which might survive the transformative relocation into the new musical piece. Josquin des Prez (ca. 1450/55–1521) used melody from the superius voice in the popular rondeau *J'ay pris amours* [I Have Taken Love] as a CF in his motet *Christe Fili Dei* [O Christ the Son of God]. Thus, the original romantic tune in this new Jesus context might signal a secret love letter to Mary. In this way, the compositions for the mass and popular music influenced each other.<sup>72</sup>

The use of the CF changed in 1450s. Instead of borrowing a single melody to serve as a CF, a composition might appropriate entire passages of polyphony. In addition, composers more frequently and significantly sourced their CFs from secular songs. This tendency culminated a long medieval tradition in devotional literature. The German mystic Henry Suso (1295–1366) described his pious

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*Philosophical Society* 60 (1970): 1–392 (347–48). See Seay, *Music in the Medieval World*, 172; Taruskin, *Music*, 252.

72 Johannes Riedel, ed., *Leise Settings of the Renaissance and Reformation Era* (Madison: A-R Editions, 1980); Edgar H. Sparks, *Cantus Firmus in Mass and Motet, 1420–1520* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1963), 63, 83–85; Taruskin, *Music*, 530.

protagonist's appropriation of secular songs: "Whenever he heard love songs or suchlike, he would turn all these about and apply them to his Wisdom [that is, Jesus], whom he loved with the most pure love of his heart, so that they encouraged his love for her to grow."<sup>73</sup>

What did the secular-sacred division look like in this period? As far as historians can reconstruct its soundscape, the fourteenth century saw little musical distinction between secular and sacred, and if anything the secular dominated. In 1400, sacred and secular music were roughly in balance, and the next hundred years would lean towards the sacred. The vernacular secular song was written and sung by troubadours and others, perhaps a gift of the Islamic world to the Far West. Long medieval tradition saw poet-composers, often nobles, writing both the textual and musical facets of song. In the fourteenth century, the polyphonic secular song, and its new technical complexities, demanded the concentrated attention of the text's authors, and lyric poetry split off as a separate art form. Only exceptional individuals would still write songs with inventive music and poetry. Machaut was the last important poet-musician, and Oswald von Wolkenstein (1376/77–1445), who wrote both monophonic and polyphonic songs, the last famous Minnesinger.<sup>74</sup>

Slowly the musical distinction between secular and sacred faded, and music was categorized by its words. Melody was preserved for its melodic ideal, regardless of its origins. For example, Juan Cornago's (d. after 1475) 1450s *Missa Ayo visto lo mappamundo* ["I Have Seen the World Map" Mass], takes as CF a popular song by that name which praises Sicily as the most beautiful island, even for one who has seen a world map. This, with Du Fay's *Missa Se la face ay pale* ["If the Face Is Pale" Mass], is one of earliest secular CFs.<sup>75</sup> We will see below the use of the secular tune *L'homme armé* [The Armed Man] as a CF in the 1460s, and, by 1475, most CFs were secular. *Victimae paschali laudes* [Praises to the Paschal Sacrifice] also served as a CF for a variety of Jesus-related musical compositions.

A similar possibility occurred in religious songs outside of the mass: the Italian poet Feo Belcari (1410–84) wrote his "Giesù, Giesù, Giesù" [Jesus, Jesus, Jesus] as an updated version of a commercial jingle for chimneysweeps,

73 Henry Suso, *Wisdom's Watch upon the Hours*, trans. Edmund Colledge (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 1994), 74 (1.1.15). See *Wisdom's Watch*, 55 (preface.4), 76 (1.2) for the identification of Jesus and Wisdom.

74 Alec Harman, *Mediaeval and Early Renaissance Music* (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1988), 96, 141, 217–23; Hoppin, *Mediaeval Music*, 267, 311–18, 343–45.

75 Juan Cornago, "Ayo visto lo mappa mundi," in *Complete Works*, ed. Rebecca L. Gerber (Madison, WI: A-R Editions, 1984), vii–xi, 1–35. See Rebecca L. Gerber, "External Influences on Spanish Composers' Musical Styles between 1450 and 1500," *Revista de Musicología* 16 (1993): 1499–1504 (1499–1500).

the “Canzona de’ spazzacamini.”<sup>76</sup> The published version (1486) of “Giesù” includes an explicit instruction to “sing like ‘Vicin, vicin, vicin, chi vuol spazar camin,’” the first line of the jingle: “Neighbours, neighbours, neighbours, who wants the chimney swept?” In Belcari’s “Jesus, Jesus, Jesus” the original *ci done pane o vin*, accepting payment in bread or wine, becomes *sente nel cor Giesù* [feels Jesus in the heart]. The updated version still sounds catchy, like a jingle: in the last stanza, the first five lines begin with *Giesù*, and the sixth ends with it.<sup>77</sup>

How did a composer use the CF as the melody in a new composition? This would typically involve different kinds of elaboration: a new cadence might split what had been a single phrase, rhythm might change, the melody might be transposed by a perfect fourth or a fifth—which in turn might change the mode or induce added accidentals. The CF might migrate between different verses, either briefly or structurally. In some essential way, however, the melody would be preserved. A cadence in the new composition probably preserved a cadence in the original. The phrase in the composition would end on the same note as the phrase in the original. The same notes would come in the same order, and any new free notes added would be too quick and trivial to detract from the original melody. Sometimes the entire melody would be run through once, thus highlighting and preserving it, perhaps before repeating it with new free notes attached. The degree of elaboration varied over time and especially by individual style. Words usually stayed close to the original CF, perhaps one or two notes off. In this period, a note was not associated with a syllable; rather, a phrase of text was associated with a phrase of melody. Even without words, melodies maintained meanings.<sup>78</sup>

Especially in the latter half of the fifteenth century, composers became ostentatiously creative in how they processed their sources for incorporation into the newly engineered music. Some of these new mass compositions lacked CFs, and instead took their names from some structural principle. In *Missa di dadi* [Mass of the Dice], traditionally attributed to Josquin, the faces of two dice depicted at the tenor part indicate the ratio between the tenor and the other voices: in the Kyrie, 2:1, the Gloria, 4:1, the Credo, 6:1, and the Sanctus,

76 The music for “Visin, visin, visin” (*Canzona de’ spazzacamini*) is in Serafino Razzi, ed., *Libro primo della laudi spirituale* (Florence: n.p., 1563), fol. 60rv. “Giesù, Giesù, Giesù,” in Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Panciatichiano 27, fol 45v.

77 Patrick Macey, *Bonfire Songs: Savonarola’s Musical Legacy* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), 44–47 for dating. Note that the up-an-octave interval on the last “chimney” (suggesting a sweep going up a chimney) was removed from the music for “Giesù.”

78 Sparks, *Cantus Firmus*, 16–31, 40, 54–55, 60–63, 73–74, 83–84, 323.

5:1. Johannes Ockeghem's (ca. 1410–97) *Missa cuiusvis toni* [Mass of Whatever Tone] allowed the performers to select a mode to sing in (see Audio Clip 4 and Fig. 18.4). Jacob Obrecht's (1457/58–1505) *Missa Forsseulement* ["Fors seulement" Mass] took the superius voice of its CF but omitted all the silent rests. In other masses, Obrecht rearranged the CF's notes by order of duration, like a musical Qur'an. Josquin used solmization to create a new CF, as in his *Missa Hercules dux Ferrariae* [Hercules the Duke of Ferrara Mass], which spelt out the patron's name using the designation of notes ("do re me fa"). His *Missa "La sol fa re mi"* ["La Sol Fa Re Mi" Mass] employed the notes in that order as a kind of artificial CF.<sup>79</sup>



<https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12434/b73c875e>



<https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12434/cb9b6ad6>



<https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12434/5deb5e56>



Audio Clip 4a, 4b, 4c Johannes Ockeghem, Kyrie (on mi, re and ut) from the *Missa Cuiusvis toni*, Blue Heron, recorded at First Church in Cambridge, 13 October 2018, CC BY 4.0.

<sup>79</sup> David Fallows, *Josquin* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), 179–87, 256–62; Hoppin, *Medieval Music*, 205; E. Eugene Helm, *Melody, Harmony, Tonality* (Lanham: Scarecrow, 2013), 78; Michael Long, "Symbol and Ritual in Josquin's *Missa Di Dadi*," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 42 (1989): 1–22; Sparks, *Cantus Firmus*, 249–50, 326–37, 367, 394; Taruskin, *Music*, 477–49, 560; James Tenney, *History of Consonance and Dissonance* (New York: Excelsior, 1988), 30. See also Jesse Rodin, *Josquin's Rome: Hearing and Composing in the Sistine Chapel* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012), 236, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199844302.001.0001>, for Obrecht's *Missa Prolationum*.

Musical score for the first system, measures 1-4. It features four staves: Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. The lyrics are: Ky - - - rie, Ky - - - .

Musical score for the second system, measures 5-8. It features four staves: Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. The lyrics are: - - - rie e - lei - - - son. Ky - - - rie e - lei - - - son.

Musical score for the third system, measures 9-12. It features four staves: Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. The lyrics are: Ky - - - rie, Ky - - - . Ky - - - rie, Ky - - - . Ky - - - rie e -

Musical score for the fourth system, measures 13-16. It features four staves: Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. The lyrics are: - - - rie e - lei - - - son. - - - rie e - lei - - - son. lei - - - son. Ky - - - rie e - lei - - - son.

The image displays a musical score for Johannes Ockeghem's Kyrie, consisting of two systems of staves. The first system (Fig. 18.4a) includes a vocal line (treble clef) and a lute line (treble clef, 8/8 time signature). The lyrics are: "Ky - - - - - rie, Ky - - - - -". The second system (Fig. 18.4b) includes a vocal line (treble clef) and a lute line (treble clef, 8/8 time signature). The lyrics are: "rie e - lei - - - - - son." The third system (Fig. 18.4c) includes a vocal line (treble clef) and a lute line (treble clef, 8/8 time signature). The lyrics are: "Ky - - - - - rie e - lei - - - - - son." The score is transcribed by Christina Hutten, CC BY-NC.

Fig. 18.4a, 18.4b, 18.4c Johannes Ockeghem, Kyrie (on mi, re and ut) from the *Missa Cuiusvis toni*. Transcription by Christina Hutten, CC BY-NC.

Some composers added cryptic references that gave a rule (a “canon”) for how to interpret the written score. Most canons were biblical, and most of these came from the Psalms or gospels.<sup>80</sup> For example, Josquin’s *Missa L’homme armé super voces musicales* [Mass on “The Armed Man” over Musical Themes] directs performers to *Noli me tangere* [do not touch me] (from Jn 20:17’s post-Resurrection Jesus asking for personal space), meaning to not “touch,” or “change,” anything beyond the rhythm. Soon afterwards he quotes Isaiah 58:1

80 Bonnie Blackburn, “The Corruption of One is the Generation of the Other: Interpreting Canonic Riddles,” *Journal of the Alamire Foundation* 4 (2012): 182–302, <https://doi.org/10.1484/j.jaf.1.102969>; Bonnie J. Blackburn and Leofranc Holford-Strevens, “Juno’s Four Grievances: The Taste for the Antique in Canonic Inscriptions,” in *Musikalische Quellen, Quellen zur Musikgeschichte*, ed. Ulrich Konrad (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2002), 159–74; Denis Collins, “Creative Collaborative Thought and Puzzle Canons in Renaissance Music,” in *Collaborative Creative Thought and Practice in Music*, ed. Margaret S. Barrett (London: Routledge, 2014), 111–25; Christopher A. Reynolds, “The Counterpoint of Allusion in Fifteenth-Century Masses,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 45 (1992): 228–60; Katelijne Schiltz, *Music and Riddle Culture in the Renaissance* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2017), 132–33.



*clama ne cesses* [shout it aloud, do not hold back] to advise performers to ignore rests.<sup>81</sup> The Jesus quotation *Dum lucem habetis credite in lucem* [Believe in the light while you have the light] (Jn 12: 36) means to ignore black notes.<sup>82</sup> A quotation of Jesus quoting a proud pharisee (*decimas de omnium qu[a]e possideo* [I ... give a tenth of all I get] (Lk 18:12)) orders one voice paralleling another in tenths.<sup>83</sup> Heinrich Isaac's (ca. 1450–1517) *Missa Tmeiskin was jonck* ["The Maiden Was Young" Mass] uses a paraphrase of Mt 15:14 and Lk 6:39 (*Si cecus cecum ducat ambo in foueam cadunt* [If the blind leads the blind, they both fall into the pit]) as well as a reference to the two thieves crucified with Jesus (*Ait latro ad latoronem* [A thief said to a thief]) to refer to the interdependence of two musical voices. Jean Japart (fl. 1474–81) made a composition with the text of Jesus's rebuke to Satan (*Vade retro* [Get thee behind me]) as a clue that it should be played backwards.<sup>84</sup> Through such complex processes, composers could enhance the music itself with additional layers of deep-ken meaning.<sup>85</sup>

A secular tune called *L'homme armé*, the "armed man" (LHA), was used as the CF in masses from the middle of the fifteenth century to the middle of the seventeenth century.<sup>86</sup> The identity of the armed man, in both the original and the polyphonic music, remains obscure. It might refer to Jesus himself, to the soldier Longinus who pierced his side with a spear or sword at the Crucifixion,<sup>87</sup>

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- 81 Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Capp.Sist.197, "Noli..." at Agnus Dei II (fol. 9v) and "Clama..." at Agnus Dei III (fol. 10v). See Fallows, *Josquin*, 148–54; Schiltz, *Music*, 161–65.
- 82 Pietro Aaron, *Libri tres de institutione harmonica* (Bologna: n.p., 1516), fol. 26r (book 1, ch. 15). See Blackburn and Holford-Strevens, "Juno's Four Grievances," 166.
- 83 For example, Isaac, Angus III, *Missa Quant j'ay au cor* or Obrecht, Agnus II, *Missa Je ne demande*. See Blackburn and Holford-Strevens, "Juno's Four Grievances," 165–66.
- 84 Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Capp.Sist.49, fol. 84v, 88r. See Richard Scherr, *Papal Music Manuscripts in the Late Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth Centuries* (Neuhausen: Hänssler-Verlag, 1996), 192–201. See Helm, *Melody, Harmony, Tonality*, 73; Schiltz, *Music*, 154; Sparks, *Cantus Firmus*, 88, 97–98; Taruskin, *Music*, 539.
- 85 Schiltz, *Music*, 73–74, also talks about the advantages of "notational compactness," by which a pithy single rule expresses information about a more extensive piece of music.
- 86 Allan W. Atlas, *Renaissance Music: Music in Western Europe, 1400–1600* (New York: Norton 1998), 148–50; Sparks, *Cantus Firmus*, 241; Taruskin, *Music*, 483–99, 528–29; Flynn Warmington, "The Ceremony of the Armed Man: The Sword, the Altar, and the L'homme armé Mass," in *Antoine Busnoys: Method, Meaning, and Context in Late Medieval Music*, ed. Paula Higgins (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999), 89–130; Craig Wright, *The Maze and the Warrior: Symbols in Architecture, Theology, and Music* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2001), 159–205, 282–88, 325–32.
- 87 Andrew Kirkman, *The Cultural Life of the Early Polyphonic Mass* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2010), 98–134; Lewis Lockwood, "Aspects of the 'L'homme armé' Tradition," *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association* 100 (1973–74): 97–122;

to George the dragon-slaying saint,<sup>88</sup> or to the Holy Roman Emperor, armed and brandishing a sword to challenge the Turks symbolically.<sup>89</sup> One of the most famous LHA masses was Du Fay's. Here, the CF moves among the various voices. Du Fay owned a copy of Guillaume de Deguileville's (d. before 1358) 1355 poem *Le Pèlerinage de l'Âme* [Pilgrimage of the Soul], which considered the crab, because of its backwards movement, a symbol of Jesus, who made three forward and retrograde trips, "three glorious returns": to earth and then back to heaven, to death and then back to life, and to hell and back.<sup>90</sup> Jesus also connects to the constellation Cancer, the crab: at Cambrai, where Du Fay probably composed the mass setting, on the summer solstice the sun would rise in the northeast, at 52 degrees, its northernmost point, before heading south, eventually reaching 128 degrees in the southeast at the winter solstice. John van Ruysbroeck (1293/94–1381) connects the dots for us: "When the sun rises as high as possible in the heavens, that is, when it enters the sign of Cancer (which means the Crab, because the sun cannot rise any higher but begins to move backwards, like a crab)... In the same way, when Christ, the divine sun, has risen as high as possible in our hearts..."<sup>91</sup> Du Fay signals the canon in the Agnus Dei: "let the crab go forward fully but go backward from the middle." Like the crab,

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Alejandro Enrique Planchart, "The Origins and Early History of *L'homme armé*," *The Journal of Musicology* 20 (2003): 305–57, <https://doi.org/10.1525/jm.2003.20.3.305>; Jesse Rodin, "Form and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Music: Problems, Fallacies, New Directions," *Journal of the Alamire Foundation* 8 (2016): 284–92, <https://doi.org/10.1484/j.jaf.5.111882>; Rodin, *Josquin's Rome*, 233–68; Adalbert Roth, "'L'homme armé, le doubtful turcq, l'ordre de la Toison d'or': Zur 'Begleitmusik' der letzten großen Kreuzungsbewegung nach dem Fall von Konstantinopel," in *Feste und Feiern im Mittelalter: Paderborner Symposion des Mediävistenverbandes*, ed. Detlef Altenburg, Jörg Jarnut, and Hans-Hugo Steinhoff (Sigmaringen: Throbecke, 1991), 469–80; Richard Taruskin, "Antoine Busnoys and the *L'homme armé* Tradition," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 39 (1986): 255–93; Emily Zazulia, "Composing in Theory: Busnoys, Tinctoris, and the *L'homme armé* Tradition," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 71 (2018): 1–73, <https://doi.org/10.1525/jams.2018.71.1.1>

88 Sean Gallagher, *Johannes Regis* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 59–114.

89 The Emperor was permitted to read the gospel at Matins on Christmas Day. Later in the century, the composer Giovanni Tommaso Cimello (d. 1591) thought that the name LHA was itself a coded instruction, indicating that the reference to an armed man, a man of both flesh and of steel, meant that the piece's notes and rests should be played doubled. James Haar, "Lessons in Theory from a Sixteenth-Century Composer," in *The Science and Art of Renaissance Music*, ed. Paul Corneilson (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1998), 153–54, 173.

90 Guillaume de Deguileville, *Le Pèlerinage de l'Âme*, ed. J. J. Stürzinger (London: Nichols and Sons, 1895), 336. Wright, *Maze and the Warrior*, 175–77 notes that the triple journey is also in the *Golden Legend*.

91 John Ruusbroec, *The Spiritual Espousals and Other Works*, trans. James A. Wiseman (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1985), 84–85.

the LHA CF reappears, in a variety of subtle and complex manipulations, in the mass itself.<sup>92</sup>

The most esoteric way to add deep-ken meaning into a composition is through mathematics. Josquin's masses, among others, numerically encoded Jesus references. Numbers could be derived by counting notes (in total, or just those of one particular tone) and counting rests in specific parts of the mass. Then, new numbers could be created by performing basic arithmetic on those first numbers, as well as factorizing them and permutating their digits. Thus, in Josquin's LHA, 225 yields 35 ( $225 = 3^2 \times 5^2$ ), and 512 becomes 888 ( $512 = 8^3$ ). The resulting second-round numbers correspond to numerical values of key Jesus words, by summing the values assigned to the letters according to a system of equivalence. Thus "Jesus" in Greek (Ἰησοῦς) = 87 or 888 (depending on counting systems), and IHS = 35. The mathematics would be inaudible to most listeners, but known to the composer, to God, and to anyone who investigated the music carefully.

Finding meaningful numbers in music can be controversial. Dieter Heikamp notes, among several numerical correspondences, that the Josquin LHA CF has the same number of notes as the gematria for "Ockeghem," a composer whose works helped inspire Josquin's LHA. In his own evaluations of proposed correspondences, Jesse Rodin prefers the simple ones that do not depend on "second-order calculations." Thus, he concludes, "The probability of such correspondences being significant diminishes with each new operation." I would suggest that, in theory, higher-order calculations "should" not weaken a correspondence, since they are mathematical and *a priori*. Rodin takes a plain-ken approach, expressed in terms of probability, to evaluate the human psychology behind a possible deep-ken logic.<sup>93</sup>

Although the ordinary mass cycle's text remained the same day to day, the CF allowed reference to a specific event or occasion, specific to the calendar. This was a technique once used in motets, now adapted to settings of the mass ordinary. Aegidius of Murino (d. ca. 1400) explained how: "first take for your tenor any antiphon or responsory or any other chant from the book of Office chants, and its words should accord [*concordare*] with the theme or occasion for

92 Jacob Obrecht, *Missa L'homme armé*, in *Collected Works*, ed. Thomas Noblitt, 9 vols. (Utrecht: Vereniging voor Nederlandse Muziekgeschiedenis, 1986), VI, 1–34. Translation from Wright, *Maze and the Warrior*, 176. See Blackburn and Holford-Strevens, "Juno's Four Grievances," 171; Rodin, *Josquin's Rome*; Schiltz, *Music*, 107–09; Taruskin, *Music*, 331, 497–99.

93 Dieter Heikamp, "Zur Struktur der Messe 'L'omme armé super voces musicales' von Josquin Desprez," *Die Musikforschung* 19 (1966): 121–41; Rodin, *Josquin's Rome*, 253–54.

which the motet is being made," and "then take your tenor and arrange it and put it in rhythm."<sup>94</sup>

The CF also added a new level of possible deep-ken, symbolic consonance, between the new music and the CF's original context. The English *Missa Caput* [Head Mass], and later similar masses by Obrecht and Ockeghem, found a CF in a long melisma on the word "caput" from an antiphon of the Maundy Thursday foot-washing ceremony. The antiphon comes from Jn 13:6–9, when Peter, rethinking his earlier refusal of Jesus's offer to wash his feet, invited Jesus to also wash "my hands and my head [*caput*]." In the new setting, *caput* might refer instead to Jesus crushing the head (*caput*) of the serpent, a christological interpretation of Genesis 3:15.<sup>95</sup>

The CF's source could thus bring in new layers of meaning. For example, composed in the 1450s, Du Fay's *Missa Se la face ay pale* was the earliest extant mass completely based on a secular CF. He used his own 1430s composition for that CF, the ballade "Se la face ay pale." Du Fay may have composed this mass for some specific purpose involving the Savoy court, where he resided. It might have been a nuptial mass for the 1452 union of Yolande of Valois (1434–78) and Amadeus of Savoy (1465–72), or it might have been for the 1453 reception of the Holy Shroud at Savoy (see Chapter 8).<sup>96</sup> The pallor referenced by the title could be caused by either swelling love or impending death. This multivalence is most prominent in the triple pun playing on *amer*, which can mean love or bitter, and rhymes with *la mer*, the sea. The canon text declares that "Se la face ay pale / La cause est amer / C'est la principale / Et tant m'est amer / Amer, qu'en la mer / Me voudroye voir" [If the face is pale / The cause is love / That is the main cause / And so bitter to me / Is love, that in the sea / Would I like to see myself].<sup>97</sup> This conjunction of meaning was clever but not unique.

Ludwig Senfl (ca. 1486–ca. 1543) added a new dimension of complexity and resonance to his two four-voice motets. His coded instruction to play in double-retrograde movement comes from Ps 85:10: "Misericordia et veritas obviaverunt sibi / Justitia et pax osculatae sunt" [Mercy and truth have met each other /

94 Edmond de Coussemaker, *Scriptorum de musica*, III, 124–25. The translation is from Taruskin, *Music*, 259. See also Sparks, *Cantus Firmus*, 88.

95 "Venit ad Petrum dixit ei," *CANTUS: A Database for Latin Ecclesiastical Chant*, <https://cantus.uwaterloo.ca/chant/671156> (audio recording available at <https://macsphere.mcmaster.ca/bitstream/11375/20915/104/MA-05-091%20A%20Venit.mp3>). See Kirkman, *Cultural Life*, 53, 77–97; Anne Walters Robertson, "The Savior, the Woman, and the Head of the Dragon in the Caput Masses and Motet," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 59 (2006): 537–630, <https://doi.org/10.1525/jams.2006.59.3.537>

96 Anne Walters Robertson, "The Man with the Pale Face, the Shroud, and Du Fay's *Missa Se la face ay pale*," *Journal of Musicology* 27 (2010), 380–88, is dubious.

97 Robertson, "Man," 391 (her translation).

Justice and peace have kissed]. He compounds the message by physically arranging the written music in a cross, to reinforce both the connection to the Crucifixion and the double-retrograde rule.<sup>98</sup>

## Lays, Motets, Carols, and Sequences

By the end of the century, the mass ordinary was the most prestigious musical genre in the Far West, but it had wrested that distinction away from isorhythmic polyphonic compositions called motets. These remained popular, and often Jesus-focused.<sup>99</sup> This final section looks more broadly at some of the Jesus-related musical forms.

In particular, the late fifteenth century saw a combination of devotional text and music in the development of prayer motets.<sup>100</sup> These were not drawn from chant, and sometimes used no CF at all. Composers created music specifically for the given text. Often the inspiration came from devotional work, including the writings of Bonaventure (1221–74) and of Bernardino of Siena (1380–1444). No clues suggest any tension between the necessarily group performance of the polyphony and the typically individual nature of meditative prayer. Examples include several works by Josquin and by Loyset Compère (d. 1518). The popular *Salve sancta facies* [Hail Holy Face], in various settings, was meant to be said before the Veronica image (see Chapter 16).<sup>101</sup> In the Low Countries, the sequence “O dulcissime iesu” [O Sweetest Jesus] asked Jesus, “let me read about you, write about you, seek you, sing about you, praise you, Jesus sweetest boy.” “I” was sick, “convicted of a crime and locked in a grim prison,” but Jesus “the brightest mirror shining throughout the world,” came as cure and liberator.

98 “Quatuor vocum Lud. Senfl. Canon Misericordia & Veritas obviaverunt sibi, Iustitia & Pax osculatae sunt.” The two versions are (1) *Crux fidelis*, at BSB 2 Mus.pr. 156/4, and (2) *O crux ave*, at Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna, SA.87.D.8. Mus 32. See Schiltz, *Music*, 172, 305–07 and Schiltz, “La storia di un’iscrizione canonica tra cinquecento e inizio seicento: Il caso di ‘Ad te, Domine, levavi animam meam’ di Philippus de Monte (1574),” *Rivista italiana di musicologia* 38 (2003): 227–56, esp. 231–33.

99 Seay, *Music in the Medieval World*, 136; Sparks, *Cantus Firmus*, 460.

100 Anne Walters Robertson, “Affective Literature and Sacred Themes in Fifteenth-Century Music,” in *Cambridge History of Fifteenth-Century Music*, ed. Anna Maria Busse Berger and Jesse Rodin (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2015), 545–60, esp. 556–57, <https://doi.org/10.1017/cho9781139057813.039>; Blackburn, “For whom,” 593–609.

101 One setting had been attributed to Josquin, and another is by Obrecht. Similarly, Josquin’s prayer-motet cycle on *O domine Jesu Christe* was meant to be said before an image of the Man of Sorrows. Howard Mayer Brown, “On Veronica and Josquin,” in *New Perspectives on Music: Essays in Honor of Eileen Southern*, ed. Josephine Wright (Warren, MI: Harmonie Park Press, 1992), 49–61.

The “I” asks Jesus to kindle the fire of his love. The poem does the same for the “I.”<sup>102</sup>

With a more public function, Du Fay composed a motet for Pope Eugene IV (1383–1447), *Supremum est mortalibus bonus* [The Greatest Good for Mortals], on the occasion of peace between the Pope and Emperor Sigismund (1368–1437). Consonant with its occasion, it emphasizes internal consonance in its harmonies and in the final chords reverberating with the names of the two pacified belligerents.<sup>103</sup>

We have unusually rich information about the performance context of one motet. During Easter Week in 1431 at Santa Maria in Trastevere in Rome, clergy carried up to the altar a platter of little balsam-and-wax figurines stamped with an image of the Lamb. As they walked, they chanted the responsory *Isti sunt agni novelli* [These are the New Lambs]. Then someone sang Du Fay’s freshly composed four-voice motet *Balsamus et munda cera* [Balsam and Pure Wax], which builds on the *Isti sunt*—including the old chant once, then repeated, and then done again in reverse order. This retrograde motion may symbolize Jesus’s complexities (human/divine, warrior/sacrifice, dying/living). At the altar, Eugene IV was celebrating the mass. Before giving them to members of his curia, he asked God to bless the wax lambs. Their power would pacify “the crash of hailstorms, the storm of whirlwinds, the attack of tempests, the rage of winds,” and “malignant spirits would tremble before the banner of the holy cross which is carved” on these images, “because, with death engulfed by the crossbeam of the cross, Jesus Christ reigns in the glory of God the Father.” The mass continued, and in the *Agnus dei* (a three-voice, also by Du Fay), the chant goes forward before going backwards when repeated.<sup>104</sup>

Among the most unusual Jesus compositions were two genealogy motets by Josquin. *Liber generationis* [Book of Begetting] set to music Jesus’s forward genealogy from David to Joseph (Mt 1), and *Factum est autem* [And It Happened] set Jesus’s backwards genealogy from Joseph to Adam (Lk 3). The two texts are prominent in the Christian liturgy, bookending the twelve days between

102 Ulrich Hascher-Burger, *Gesungene Innigkeit* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 122–23, 251–54. See Reinhard Strohm, “Sacred Song in the Fifteenth Century: Cantio, Carol, Lauda, Kirchenlied,” in *Cambridge History of Fifteenth-Century Music*, ed. Anna Maria Busse Berger and Jesse Rodin (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2015), 763–64, <https://doi.org/10.1017/cho9781139057813.052>

103 Mikołaj z Radomia (fl. 1420s) composed a Gloria that pursued peace, after an introductory chase canon with a dance rhythm. Johannes Ciconia’s (d. 1412) Gloria No. 1 dramatically emphasized “pax,” peace, in its first seven measures. See Atlas, *Renaissance Music*, 39; Taruskin, *Music*, 346–48.

104 Agostino Patrizi de Piccolomini, *L’oeuvre de Patrizi Piccolomini ou le cérémonial papal de la première Renaissance*, ed. Marc Dykmans, 2 vols. (Vatican: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1980–82), I, 136–39. See Wright, *Maze and the Warrior*, 107–09.

Christmas and Epiphany, and these motets were probably composed for the 1480–81 winter. What could be chanted in five minutes took three times as long to perform in Josquin's sophisticated polyphony.

Within a century of their debut, critics were already sharing a negative assessment of these two motets' texts, a sentiment that continues today. Humanist Heinrich Glarean (1488–1563) spoke of such *sterili* [barren] material. In our time, Ludwig Finscher points to the length and "dullness" of the texts and melodies. Jeremy Noble has called them "apparently unpromising texts." Given the "sheer craziness of setting" to music "two of the most improbable motet texts available," David Fallows finds it hard to imagine anyone "composing such motets for any normal purposes." The low estimation made all these commentators marvel all the more at what Josquin engineered from these genealogies. Except for a flourish on the name Zorobabel, which gets repeated five times, the resulting polyphony did not express musically the textual meaning; it was an abstract, purely musical piece.<sup>105</sup> We might consider what the deep ken might hear in these motets. Could it have found beauty in the list of names to correspond to the beauty in the music? Could it find delight or reassurance in these chains passing through centuries between Adam to Jesus? If humans were indeed bored by the words, perhaps God was not.

Most of what we call carols are actually hymns developed in and after the eighteenth century, but a different musical genre of carols were sung in the fifteenth. Often used in religious processions, these carols, monophonic or polyphonic, were distinctive for their repeated verse, called a "burden," between stanzas. Carols current in our century included "Resonet in laudibus," "In dulci jubilo," "Angelus ad virginem," "Narodil se Kristus Pán," and "This Endris Night." The "Boar's Head" carol mostly celebrates the yule tradition of eating the head of a decapitated boar, and indirectly concedes a single clause for Jesus, as the speaker is "singing praises to the Lord."<sup>106</sup> A variation, "The Boar's Head that We Bring Here," focuses more on Jesus: the boar's head itself "betokeneth a prince without peer," and the fact that it is "acceptab[le] at every feste" consonates with the universal relevance of Jesus, who should be likewise acceptable "to most & least."<sup>107</sup> In one carol, Sir Christmas ("Syre

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105 Fallows, *Josquin*, 95–96; Ludwig Finscher, "Four-Voice Motets," in *The Josquin Companion*, ed. Richard Sherr (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000): 249–80 (266–67); Henricus Glareanus, *Dodecachordon* (Basil: n.p., 1547), 365; Jeremy Noble, "The Function of Josquin's Motets," *Tijdschrift van de Vereniging voor Nederlandse Muziekgeschiedenis* 35 (1985): 9–22 (19–21).

106 Oxford, Balliol College, MS 354, fol. 228r. For the traditions, see James E. Spears, "The 'Boar's Head Carol' and Folk Tradition," *Folklore* 85 (1974): 194–98.

107 BL Add. MS 5665, fol. 7v–8r. The most exuberance comes with the melisma on the preposition "without."

Cristesmasse”) arrives singing Noel, Noel (“Nowell, nowell”) to announce that Jesus had been born from a virgin.<sup>108</sup> This is one of Father Christmas’s earliest known appearances.

*Victimae paschali laudes* was a sequence—a troped extended melisma—already centuries old in 1400. It was one of over a dozen sequences used by the Western Rite. *Victimae* would be chanted near or on Easter, either during the mass or as part of a liturgical drama, such as the visitation to the tomb. By 1400, *Victimae* was metrical and strophic.<sup>109</sup> In the German-speaking lands, popular vernacular hymns (*Leise*) would be sung after *Victimae* in mass, and sometimes in liturgical dramas.

For the liveliest *Victimae*, we go to the Cathedral of Auxerre, France.<sup>110</sup> There, as was the custom, the youngest canon at the cathedral would purchase a leather ball, called a *pilota*. He would present it to the cathedral’s dean, who would hold it in his left hand, and begin to dance around a labyrinth while intoning the *Victimae*, accompanied by an organ. The other canons would join hands and join the dance, and the dean would throw the ball at each of them. After concluding the sequence, the dean and canons would join other Church officials and local nobility for a feast of dead rabbit, boar, and deer, and wine (not more than two refills per person), all at the youngest canon’s expense, while a sermon was intoned. After the meal, they went to vespers as the cathedral’s large bells rang.<sup>111</sup>

We know the dance happened annually from at least 1396, since in that year we begin to see protests against the tradition that the most junior canon pays for the ball and the feast. By 1412, the size of the ball was reduced enough to make it less a financial burden, but not so reduced to allow the dean to palm it. In 1471, the newest canon protested again, turning for assistance to Guillaume Durand’s (ca. 1230–96) handbook, which advised that ballgames were best left at the church doors. The cathedral chapter, the clergy assisting and advising the bishop, did not make him pay—they found a ball from a previous year—but did not give up the ballgame.<sup>112</sup>

108 *Ibid.*, fol. 8v–9v.

109 Taruskin, *Music*, 86.

110 Wright, *Maze and the Warrior*, 138–47. For an example see the *Missale ad usum ecclesiae Autissidorensis*, BnF MS Lat. 17312, fol. 199r.

111 “Explication d’un terme de la basse latinité,” *Mercure de France* (May 1726): 921–22; Constant J. Mews, “Liturgists and Dance in the Twelfth Century: The Witness of John Belet and Sicard of Cremona,” *Church History* 78 (2009): 512–48 (518–19), <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009640709990412>; Wright, *Maze and the Warrior*, 139–140.

112 “Explication,” 915–16; Jean Lebeuf, *Mémoires concernant l’histoire civile et ecclésiastique d’Auxerre*, 4 vols. (Auxerre: Perriquet and Rouillé, 1855), IV, 321–22.



Auxerre was not unique; similar dances happened at Reims and at Sens. In 1413, clergy asked the chapter at the Cathedral of Sens (50 km north of Auxerre) for permission to “play the game as well during the ceremony” of Easter. A century later, the Sens chapter was nervous about men and women dancing together during the game: the clergy was “dancing a round-dance—not jumping as in other peculiar dances” when suddenly “a large number of people of both sexes ran to join in the said round-dance, where perhaps much evil might be perpetrated.” Apparently, each canon would dance while holding the hand of a choirboy, and the entire tradition was sustained only because the canons made large financial donations to the church. Around 1517 it was abolished.<sup>113</sup>

## Envoi

Fifteenth-century elevated speech was so inclined towards the deep ken that some contemporaries took up that same perspective to criticize it. Al-Suyuti denounced Qur’an reciters who followed the fashions of rapidly delivered secular poetry; instead, he advised, “stop at its marvels” and “stimulate your heart.”<sup>114</sup> Church authorities and scholars deplored the dissonance between music that was secular, even in its origins, and the sacredness of the liturgy. In 1435, the Council of Basel explicitly forbade “secular songs” to be sung in church.<sup>115</sup> The theorist Carlo Valgulio, who wanted music to have a positive moral effect on its listeners, complained about the contemporary “adulterous songs which bastardize music.”<sup>116</sup> Despairing that “sacred texts are accompanied by the most unholy sounds,” Erasmus condemned music brought “out of the dance-halls and taverns and into the churches.”<sup>117</sup> Other deep-ken theorists had concerns about perceived dissonance between contemporary and ancient music, and between actual music and the divine music. They denounced as “barbarisms” the clashes between melodies and modes, between melodies and Latin grammar (such as grammatically long syllables being musically abbreviated), and between musical divisions and grammatical divisions.

A plain-ken attitude, however, was gaining ground. The plain-ken concerns among textual scholars about degradation over time (see Chapter 11) spilled

113 Quoted in Wolfgang Krönig, “Osterfreude und liturgisches Spiel,” *Quatember* 43 (1979): 115–16.

114 Al-Suyuti, *Le parfait manuel*, 375–76 (35.10).

115 Tanner, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, I, 491.

116 Quoted in Vincenzo Galilei, *Dialogo della musica antica e moderna* (Florence: Giunti, 1602), 83.

117 Erasmus, “Institutio Christiani Matrimonii,” trans. Michael J. Heath, in *Spiritualia and Pastoralia*, ed. John W. O’Malley and Louis A. Perraud, CWE 69, 427.

over into music. Before and during the Protestant Reformation there were liturgical reform movements, particularly opposed to sequences because of their extra-biblical texts. In particular, Carthusians and Cistercians were not happy with tropes introducing non-biblical text into the proper of the mass. The Carthusians had little interest in the elaborations of sequences and melismas. The Cistercians accepted sequences, but disliked tropes and blocked the expansion of the office cycle; they actively simplified the more extreme melismas. Like the Protestant reformers, both orders sought to reach a pure original source for liturgy. Already by 1400, most tropes, outside the Kyrie, Sanctus, and Agnus Dei, had all but disappeared.<sup>118</sup>

In some eyes, polyphony was as problematic as textual innovations. Some critics, like John XXII (1244–1334) in the 1320s, were simply conservative, protesting against the modern rhythm, vernacular, rapid melismas, secular songs, and these newfangled, intoxicating motets. Others feared the encroachment of plain-ken perspectives on music, for polyphony dangerously distracted from God to the human artiste, and could undermine the deep-ken unity among music, text, and ritual. In the last decades of the century, the criticism increased, becoming a broader opposition to all polyphony.<sup>119</sup>

Admittedly, the composer's sense of being a genius was growing. Machaut's mass was special in part because it was known to be written by one person. Previously, only secular music had named authors. The author was irrelevant compared to the intended "recipient," God. One anecdote recalls Josquin cussing out someone who had attempted to enhance one of his works with additional ornamentation beyond what he had composed: "You ass, why do you add ornaments? If I had wanted them, I would have added them myself."<sup>120</sup>

The next century would hold some delights for the deep ken, like the extreme polyphony of Alessandro Striggio's (ca. 1536/37–92) ca. 1565 mass that coordinated not four or five, but sixty different voices. The future, however, slowly pivoted towards the plain ken: a loosening of deep-ken rules, reorientation of music towards a human audience, the focus on clear enunciation of words for that audience, a sense that music evolves over time, and an increased sense of composers' genius (like that of visual artists), to the extent that a passage of Beethoven is now important because it "is Beethoven." The rising instrumental music could express fuzzy emotions, but without words had no capacity to

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118 Hiley, *Gregorian*, 132–34, 154–55.

119 Harman, *Mediaeval and Early Renaissance Music*, 122–23; Kirkman, *Cultural Life*, 135–51; Seay, *Music in the Medieval World*, 93, 122; Rob C. Wegman, *The Crisis of Music in Early Modern Europe, 1470–1530* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

120 Johann Manlius, "Scholae et stvdia lingvarum artium ac facultatum," in Johann Manlius, *Locorum communium collectanea* (Frankfurt: n.p., 1566), 542.

articulate precise doctrinal or narrative truths about Jesus. Eventually, even dissonance became, if not beautiful, something that commanded attention and respect. In the twentieth century, Arnold Schoenberg celebrated his “emancipation of the dissonance” from the rules of consonance, and dissonant music would be variously celebrated as reflecting core values of Black America, Buddhism, and democracy.<sup>121</sup> In sounds that would have scratched the deep ken’s eardrums, the plain ken could find a crude, craggy beauty.

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121 Arnold Schoenberg, “Opinion or Insight?,” in *Style and Idea*, ed. Leonard Stein, trans. Leo Black (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), 258–64 (258); Dane Rudhyar, *Dissonant Harmony* (Carmel: Hamsa, 1928); Duke Ellington, “Interview in Los Angeles [1941],” *The Duke Ellington Reader*, ed. Mark Tucker (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993), 148–51.

# ORIENTATIONS



# 19. Resembling Jesus

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On his 1483–84 pilgrimage to Jerusalem, Felix Fabri (1441–1502) took advantage of a local wall to measure himself, literally, against Jesus: on the Mount of Olives, during his arrest, Jesus had fallen back with his arms out against a wall, leaving an imprint on the rock as if it were wax. Fabri and his party “laid our bodies, as far as we could, in the holy imprint, putting our arms, hands, face and breast into the hollow, and measuring it by our own figures.”<sup>1</sup>

This chapter looks at less literal examples of imitation of, and proximity to, Jesus. Some cultists moved closer to Jesus by imitating him, and others found deep-ken significance in parallels between Jesus and their notable contemporaries. Some, on a continuum from actors to kings, behaved—or were seen to behave—in ways that created a deep-ken consonance between themselves and Jesus. For a generation now, scholars have delighted in labelling activities as “performative,” and kings certainly acted in performative ways.<sup>2</sup> We can also look to the other end, and understand actors’ performances as performative, and sacred in ways not unlike their kings’. Some of the imitators imitated Jesus’s poverty through nudity, and his Passion through flagellation, practices which became intimate, and sexual, in the eyes of some authorities.

Imitation is a form of consonance. A king who imitates Jesus is an octave away from Jesus. Imitating a deep-ken action recreates the meaning of the original. This chapter divides imitation in another way, by looking at who was doing the imitation. Among the Jesus cult’s masses, the surviving sources give us the best understanding of actors, rulers, and mystics, alongside other nudists and masochists.

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1 Felix Fabri, *The Wanderings of Felix Fabri*, trans. Aubrey Stewart, 2 vols. (London: Palestine Pilgrims’ Text Society, 1892), I, 476–79.

2 Victor Turner, *The Anthropology of Performance* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1986); Richard Schechner, *Between Theatre and Anthropology* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985).

## Actors

Perhaps the form of Jesus imitation that is least alien to our understanding was theatre. For centuries, some aspects of the mass, especially around Easter and Christmas, were acted out as liturgical drama. Various details elevated these performances, which consonated with aspects of the mass already consonating more widely. The texts were usually sung in Latin, not spoken or in a vernacular. As with the mass, members of the clergy performed the roles, and the drama was itself performed in a church. Some of the music was secular in its origins, but so too was the music of the mass itself (see Chapter 18). Liturgical dramas served as a kind of ornament before and on the mass. Processions and masses could involve *tableaux vivant* of biblical scenes, as when children in Paris (1424) performed a play of New Testament scenes “without speaking or making gestures, as if they were images lifted onto a wall.”<sup>3</sup> Historians tend to stress that, by this time, this liturgical drama was a dying form: it survived into the sixteenth century, but in our period lacked originality. The performers themselves would have been surprised by the criticism. Their goal was not to break with tradition, but to consonate with it. A Passion Play is the Passion recreated, transposed into the here and now. Through consonance, the action accesses deep-ken power.<sup>4</sup>

Many actors were selected not through audition, but because their off-stage life resonated with their on-stage roles or with the dignity of the production as a whole. In fifteenth-century Corpus Christi plays in England, actors would be chosen from guilds that resonated with some aspect of the scene. Winemakers might perform the Cana wedding miracle, sailors the Flood, and goldsmiths the Adoration of the Magi.<sup>5</sup> In the town of Chester, when the hospitality industry dramatized the Harrowing of Hell, Jesus left behind the soul of an alewife who had allied with Muhammad to cheat her customers by using undersized glasses.<sup>6</sup> In 1490, the Gonfalone confraternity, established in Rome in the thirteenth century, produced a Passion Play, in Italian verse, in the Colosseum. It was so successful that they printed a version of it in 1501. Soon, they preceded it with a flagellant procession, and gave it an encore in the form of a Resurrection play on the Easter weekend. Some years it was cancelled, because expenses outran

3 *Journal d'un bourgeois de Paris, 1405–1449*, ed. Alexandre Tuetey (Paris: Champion, 1881), 200.

4 Richard H. Hoppin, *Medieval Music* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1978), 179, 185–86; Sven Hakon Rossel, *History of Danish Literature* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), 41; Albert Seay, *Music in the Medieval World* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland, 1991), 57; Richard Taruskin, *Music from the Earliest Notation to the Sixteenth Century* (New York: Oxford UP, 2009), 93–94.

5 Paul Murray Kendall, *The Yorkist Age* (New York: Doubleday, 1962), 43.

6 Geoffrey Hindley, *England in the Age of Caxton* (London: Granada, 1979), 159.

available funds, or, as in 1522–24, because of concerns about riots. One fifteenth-century German visitor to Rome observed that the Colosseum Passion Play, including the Crucifixion and Judas's hanging, was done "by living people... They were all rich people's children, and so it went orderly and expensively."<sup>7</sup>

Some plays moved beyond the Bible narrative even while elaborating on Biblical themes, and drew from both kens. The mid-fifteenth century saw several plays using the personification of virtues to work out the logic of salvation. The ca. 1447 Dutch play *Die eerst Blijshap van Onzer Vrouwen* [The First Joy of Our Women] has the three sisters Mercy, Justice, and Faith debating how to save humanity. Their plea to the angels to sacrifice themselves wins no volunteers. They next ask for a similar sacrifice from the Trinity, to the bewilderment of the Father trying to dodge the request ("What shall I do without annoying one of the sisters?"). Mercy appeals directly to Jesus, noting that only he can save them. Jesus does not welcome this, and God the Father regrets creating the three virtues in the first place: "I'm sorry that I made them." Eventually, Jesus assents to his Father's will and sacrifices himself for us.<sup>8</sup> In some French Passion Plays, Mercy and Justice, assisted respectively by Peace and Truth, are in formal litigation against each other, and only the sacrifice of Jesus can reconcile the feuding parties.<sup>9</sup> All these plays were vernacular, and situated allegorical figures, with their deep-ken resonance, in decidedly plain-ken ways, for a strikingly human psychology motivates their behaviour.

Other plays were less dignified, even as they explored the theme of dignity. In the 1510s, at the Swiss town of Vevey on the north shore of Lake Geneva, a play was performed, a variation on a medieval French farce called the *Prêtre Crucifié* [Crucified Priest]. In it, a priest ordered a life-size cross from a sculptor, and then, when the latter goes to town, has an affair with the sculptor's wife. The action of this Swiss version is not clear—only fragments are intact—but in the traditional version the sculptor returns early, and the naked priest hides in plain sight on the cross, hoping to pass himself as a sculpted Jesus. The sculptor, who knows exactly what is going on, remarks that he must have been drunk when he sculpted this corpus, and in the interest of decorum hacks off the priest's

7 Arnold von Harff, *Die Pilgerfahrt des Ritters Arnold von Harff* (Cologne: Heberle, 1860), 31.

8 H. J. E. Endepols, ed., *Viif geestelijke toneelspelen der middeleeuwen* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1940), 112.

9 Peter Meredith and Lynette Muir, "The Trial in Heaven in the 'Eerste Bliscap' and other European Plays," *Dutch Crossing* 8 (1984): 84–92; Lynette R. Muir, *The Biblical Drama of Medieval Europe* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1995), 87–88; Lynette R. Muir, "The Trinity in Drama," *Comparative Drama* 10 (1976): 116–29.



genitals.<sup>10</sup> Jesus was great, and great people hide their genitals, and so no genitals could be displayed. This reflects the difficulties of representing the deep ken in a plain-ken world, as well as a comment on how poorly the adulterous priest was imitating Jesus. This sculpture, like scripture, was a plain-ken representation of the deep ken, created by a human in a human environment, who in the struggle to preserve decorum sexually mutilated a rival.

We lack sources to know how realistically performances of the *Prêtre Crucifié* portrayed the nudity and its mutilation, but more mainstream dramatics achieved innovations in stagecraft that astonished contemporaries. In particular, stagehands sought new heights in treating the performance area as a volume in space, with three dimensions to perform sleight of hand. When Sigismund returned to Constance in 1417, he was welcomed with a dramatic performance of the Adoration of the Magi, who had followed a golden star dangling from an iron lead, so slight as to be nearly invisible.<sup>11</sup> In 1462, at Viterbo a young man representing the Saviour filled a chalice with blood apparently flowing from a side wound.<sup>12</sup> In one 1481 Passion drama in Ferrara, a mechanical serpent was large enough that Jesus's command could force it to disgorge fourteen singers from within.<sup>13</sup>

The Ascension of Jesus required the greatest feats of engineering. In the fourteenth century, Jesus had risen slowly. The poet Franco Sacchetti (ca. 1332–1400) recalled one friar who complained that while the actual Jesus went up with a sonic boom, in the play of Florence's Santa Maria del Carmine Church the Jesus ascended so slowly that "if he went any more slowly he would still be on his way"<sup>14</sup>—a plain-ken continuity between Jesus's time and his own even in what was likely a joke. Technical improvements gave the stagehands more control, especially in Florence. Through the magic of pulleys and counterweights, perhaps similar to those invented by Filippo Brunelleschi (1377–1446) to build the cathedral, ropes could pull up a leather harness holding Jesus.<sup>15</sup> Abraham

10 P. Aebischer, "Quelques Textes du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle en patois fribourgeois," *Archivum Romanicum* 4 (1920): 342–61; 7 (1923): 288–336; 15 (1931): 512–40; Graham A. Runnalls, "The Medieval Actors' Roles found in the Fribourg Archives," *Pluteus* 4–5 (1986–87): 5–67.

11 Ulrich Richental, *Die Chronik des Konzils von Konstanz*, ed. Thomas Martin Buck (2019), A-Version, K-Version, and G-Version c. 200, <https://edition.mgh.de/001/html/edition.html>

12 Pius II, *Commentarii rerum memorabilium* (Frankfurt: Avbriana, 1614), 209 (book 8).

13 Lewis Lockwood, *Music in Renaissance Ferrara 1400–1505* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009), 152.

14 Franco Sacchetti, *Le novelle di F. Sacchetti*, 2 vols. (Florence: Felice Le Monnier, 1860), I, 174.

15 Cyrilla Barr, "Music and Spectacle in Confraternity Drama of Fifteenth-Century Florence," in *Christianity and the Renaissance: Image and Religious Imagination in the*

of Suzdal, a Russian bishop at the Council of Florence in 1439, was astonished by the Ascension play at Santa Maria del Carmine. In 1466, when the ascending Jesus entered the fake cloud, light dazzled from the “new star” made of wood and enhanced with hidden fireworks with a copper lantern in each ray. This could be dangerous: in 1485, an accident killed two parishioners, and the church had to be reconsecrated after the bodies were removed.<sup>16</sup> Special effects could, sometimes, be an impressive way of representing the deep ken in a plain-ken way, giving the illusion that beings mostly restricted to two dimensions could also achieve a third. Just as linear perspective represented three dimensions in a two-dimensional space, so such special effects allowed three dimensions to be represented in three-dimensional space, liberating gravity-bound actors from a flat earth.

## Rulers

The height of actor-role consonance occurred at the highest level of society; there the deep ken almost entirely eclipsed the plain. John Wycliffe (ca. 1328–84) underlined the importance of this, noting that we must obey rulers who imitate Jesus<sup>17</sup>—even the kings whose imitation remained symbolic, avoiding the need to step into the messy world. Perhaps taking a cue from their monarchs, contemporaries adopted a deep ken to see consonance and dissonance between royal lives and Jesus’s.

Take Castile’s House of Trastámara, for example, which understood, and understood itself, as actively and passively imitating Jesus. In 1467, Henry IV of Castile (1425–74) had the governor of Madrid’s Alcázar fortress arrested for treachery, but then forgave him: “Greater was the evil of Judas, who sold our lord and savior,” and if Jesus had not executed Judas, the king remarked, he

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*Quattrocento*, ed. Timothy Verdon (Tallahassee, FL: Florida State University School of Visual Arts, 1985), 376–404 (382).

- 16 Barr, “Music and Spectacle,” 377–78, 381–86; Alessandro D’Ancona, *Origini del teatro italiano*, 3 vols. (Turin: Ermanno Loescher, 1891), I, 246–47; Santi Mattei, *Ragionamento intorno all’antica chiesa del Carmine di Firenze* (Florence: Antonio Giuntini, 1869), 15–16; Alexander Wesselovsky, “Italienische Mysterien in einem russischen Reisebericht des XV Jahrhunderts,” *Russische Revue* 10 (1877): 425–41.
- 17 John Wycliffe, *Tractatus de potestate pape*, ed. Johann Loserth (London: Trübner, 1907), 63–65 (ch. 4). It is tempting to use Azfar Moin and Alan Strathern’s transcendental-immanent distinction to this analysis of rulers, but I cannot match that distinction up with the kens, and conclude that we are talking about fundamentally different issues. See A. Azfar Moin and Alan Strathern, ed., *Sacred Kingship in World History: Between Immanence and Transcendence* (New York: Columbia UP, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.7312/moin20416>

could not execute the governor.<sup>18</sup> In the 1460s, Henry's half-brother Alfonso, Prince of Asturias (1453–68), was linked with Jesus, as both were described as sacrificial lambs. In 1478, Henry's half-sister Isabella gave birth to a son John, the new Prince of Asturias (1478–97). The *converso* chronicler Hernando del Pulgar (ca. 1436–92) connected John with the birth of Jesus, noting the parallels between his mother Isabella—Spanish for Elizabeth—and Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist. Another chronicler found an analogy between the newborn prince and Spain on the one hand, and Jesus and the Church on the other.<sup>19</sup>

A popular inspiration for social elites keen to imitate Jesus was his washing of his disciples' feet, for centuries a ritual practiced by popes and kings alike. In John's Gospel, Jesus himself had framed this action as inspirational and socially subversive. "Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet," he urged, "you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master" (Jn 13:14–16).

Thus, each year the doge of Venice washed the feet of twelve poor citizens. The resonance was made obvious: in the doge's chapel, now St. Mark's Basilica, a thirteenth-century mosaic of the Washing of the Feet was prominent under another one, of the Last Supper. The dukes of Ferrara also washed the feet of the poor on Maundy Thursday,<sup>20</sup> as did the English kings. Measures were taken to minimize the risk to and discomfort of the king—which reminds us that the deep-ken meaning was more important than the plain ken's: the poor feet were scrubbed repeatedly beforehand, to present the king an abstract and odourless poverty. During outbreaks of plague, a representative would replace the king entirely. The deep ken saw the transitivity of consonance: if the king consonated with the representative, and the representative with Jesus, then the king, too, consonated with Jesus. Outside the plain ken, there was no expectation to be anything more than a performative ally to the poor.<sup>21</sup>

18 Diego Enriquez del Castillo, *Cronica del rey D. Enrique el quarto de este nombre*, ed. Josef Miguel de Flores (Madrid: Antonio de Sancha, 1787), 221.

19 Peggy K. Liss, "Isabel, Myth and History," in *Isabel La Catolica, Queen of Castile*, ed. David A. Boruchoff (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 57–78 (61); Peggy K. Liss, *Isabel the Queen* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992), 155; Gutierre de Palma, *Divina Retribución sobre la Caída de España en tiempo del noble rey Don Juan el Primero*, ed. José María Escudero de la Peña (Madrid: Sociedad de Bibliófilos Españoles, 1879), 78–79.

20 Antonio Beccadelli, *De dictis et factis Alphonsi Regis Aragonum* (Rostock: Myliandrinis, 1589), 93 (4.1); Sabadino degli Arienti Giovanni, *Art and Life at the Court of Ercole I d'Este*, ed. Werner L. Gundersheimer (Geneva: Droz, 1972), 88–92.

21 Anne Bagnall Yardley, *Performing Piety: Musical Culture in Medieval English Nunneries* (New York, 2006), 130–33, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-05733-4>

Multiple kinds of royal imitation of Jesus recurred in the life of Richard II of England (1367–99). Richard impressed himself with, and highlighted, the parallels between his own life and Jesus's.<sup>22</sup> Three kings (or "Magi") attended his birth: that of Spain, of Navarre, and of Portugal. Thus, Epiphany was important to him.<sup>23</sup> Later in his life, Parliament informed Richard that they had desired his rule as they desired the arrival of Baby Jesus.<sup>24</sup> On 21 August 1392, Richard and his wife Anne of Bohemia (1366–94) entered London,<sup>25</sup> the king having forgiven the city for its abandonment of him in 1387, when he had lost control of his government. This formal entrance expressed both Richard's authority and London's loyalty. London presented itself as the heavenly Jerusalem, to motivate Richard towards a Jesus-like forgiving peace. One report has him announce before entering, "They're all my people now, and now I'll be their king," a parallel with the New Testament vision of Jesus's entrance into the heavenly Jerusalem being hailed" with "They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God" (Revelation 21:3). Before the king entered, a condemned murderer carrying a wooden cross asked forgiveness. At the end of the procession the citizens gave the royal couple an image on wood of the Crucifixion.<sup>26</sup>

The triumphal return was short-lived, and Richard was deposed in 1399 by Henry Bolingbroke (ca. 1367–1413), who became Henry IV (r. 1399–1413). Imprisoned at Flint Castle, Richard looked down on the army gathering around and began to pray, explicitly comparing his situation to Jesus's, "Good Lord God! I commend myself into thy holy keeping, and cry thee mercy, that thou mayest pardon all my sins; since it is thy pleasure that I should be delivered into the hands of mine enemies; and if they cause me to die, I will take death patiently

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22 Dillian Gordon, L. Monnas, and C. Elam, ed., *The Regal Image of Richard II and the Wilton Diptych* (London: Harvey Miller, 1997); Nigel Saul, "Richard II and the Vocabulary of Kingship," *English Historical Review* 110 (1995): 854–77.

23 William Thorne, *Chronicle of St. Augustine's Abbey, Canterbury*, trans. A. H. Davis (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1934), 591.

24 *Rotuli Parliamentorum: ut et petitiones et placita in parlamento*, ed. John Strachey, 6 vols. (London: n.p., 1767–77), II, 362.

25 Christopher Fletcher, *Richard II: Manhood, Youth, and Politics, 1377–99* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008), 213–20; Gordon Kipling, "Richard II's 'Sumptuous Pageants' and the Idea of Civic Triumph," in *Pageantry in the Shakespearean Theater*, ed. David M. Bergeron (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1985), 83–103 (88–89).

26 Quotation in Richard Maidstone, *Concordia (The Reconciliation of Richard II with London)*, trans. A. G. Rigg, ed. David R. Carlson (Kalamazoo, MI: Consortium for the Teaching of the Middle Ages, 2003), line 217. See Helen Suggett, "A Letter Describing Richard II's Reconciliation with the City of London, 1392," *English Historical Review* 62 (1947), 209–13.

as thou didst take it for us all.”<sup>27</sup> Contemporary sources followed Richard in seeing a Jesus connection. One remembered Richard, anticipating his execution, asking “beloved Jesus,” “What do these people want with me?” He then called on Charles VI of France (1368–1422) to help Isabella of Valois (1389–1409), Richard’s second wife and Charles’s daughter, “for that same love for which our Saviour Jesus Christ descended in the blessed Virgin Mary to take upon himself human nature.” Calming the king, the Bishop of Carlisle advised him that “if we must die, let us accept death willingly, and call to mind the passion of our Saviour.”<sup>28</sup> Finally, Richard agreed to abdicate, but asked to be allowed to keep certain real estate he would use to fund a priest to do memorial masses for him at Westminster. The French chronicler Jean Creton (fl. 1386–1420) explicitly made the comparison between Henry’s refusals to take responsibility for the execution of Richard with Pilate’s washing his hands of Jesus’s death. Ironically, after his abdication, one chronicler mocked the ex-King for the gap between his wealthy clothes and Jesus’s more modest attire.<sup>29</sup>

Henry IV had taken the throne from Richard II in 1399. In 1460, Richard of York (1411–60), a once-removed cousin of Richard II, attempted to take the throne back from Henry IV’s grandson. The new Richard fared little better than the old, and his defeat was again framed to resonate with Jesus’s. One account of the death of the pretender Richard of York after the battle of Wakefield (1460) included a Passion-like mockery, made explicit in the text: they stood him on a small anthill, and crowned him with “a worthless wreath made of marshgrass,” in a way “not different than the Jews before the Lord.” They called out to him, “Hail king without kingdom! Hail king without inheritance! Hail leader and prince, utterly without people and possession!” Then they executed him.<sup>30</sup>

A particularly deep-ken consonance between ruler and Jesus developed as word of the conversion of the Lithuanians (see Chapter 7) reached the Far West. At Constance, the once polytropic Prince Vytautas (ca. 1350–1430) acquired recognition as a Christian prince, a good reputation he maintained even while building harmonious relations with the Turks and the Hussites. The Bavarian

27 John Webb, ed., “Translation of a French Metrical History of King Richard II [by Jean Creton],” *Archaeologia* 20 (1824): 1–423 (162–63), <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261340900025789>

28 Benjamin Williams, ed., *Chronicque de la Traïson et Mort de Richart Deux Roy Dengleterre* (London: n.p., 1846), 202–06.

29 George B. Stow, Jr., ed., *Historia Vitae et Regni Ricardi Secundi* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1977), 156, lines 3761–65. See Ian Mortimer, *The Fears of Henry IV: The Life of England’s Self-made King* (London: Vintage Books, 2007), 189; Webb, ed., “Translation,” 150, 179.

30 John Whethamstede, *Registra abbatiae Johannis Whethamstede, Abbatis monasterii sancti albani*, ed. Henry Thomas Riley (London: Longman, 1872), 382.

Dominican Johannes von Wünschelberg (1385–1483) promoted an ambiguous Latin prophecy popular in England, known as “The Lily, the Lion, and the Son of Man.”<sup>31</sup> In this, the Son of Man—a title Jesus applies to himself in the Gospels—would come to the Land of the Lion to defeat the ruling Lily; then, amidst devastating warfare, the pope would lose his power. The Son of Man role had been linked to Edward III (1312–77) and to later English rulers. One version had the Son going to the Holy Land, which resonated with Henry IV’s pilgrimage.<sup>32</sup> If it had not yet come true in western Europe, perhaps it was meant to apply to Bohemia: it made sense if one saw Hungary as the Lily, Bohemia as the Lion, and Vytautas as the Son of Man.<sup>33</sup>

John Cantius of Kraków (1390–1473) wrote a memorial sermon for the deceased Vytautas that, with the deep ken, associated his body parts with those of the crucified Jesus: “Jesus told his disciples that his hands, feet, and chest represented his works, paths, and love. Similarly, one might think of the invincible Grand Duke, a man who shared the common Catholic faith and was a special friend of Poland’s.” The Grand Duke’s “hands were trained for battle and his fingers for war,” protecting both Lithuania and Poland “incursions by infidels” while widening their borders. His feet were highlighted by the fact that he “travelled widely and accumulated great wealth such as was permitted only to Christian kings,” for the benefit of his people. Here, John pointedly commented that it was prayers, not wealth, that assisted the dead. Jesus’s chest, in turn, corresponded to Vytautas’s soul, and that soul now needed your help, financial help, to achieve salvation.<sup>34</sup>

In contrast to Cantius’s well-designed account, a ruler’s consonance with Jesus could be complicated by multiple, post-mortem sources and indirect sources. Epic poetry in the Balkans saw Prince Lazar of Serbia (ca. 1329–89) as a Jesus-figure. On the eve of the Battle of Kosovo, where he would die, Lazar in a dream was given the choice between earthly and heavenly kingdoms. He chose the latter. A revelation that he would be betrayed in battle set the stage for a new Last Supper, with a new Judas-figure betraying the Prince. Significant variations

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- 31 Luc D’Achery, ed., *Spicilegium sive collectio veterum aliquot scriptorum qui in Galliae bibliothecis delituerant*, 3 vols. (Paris: Montalant, 1723), III, 104; Friedrich Lauchert, “Materialien zur Geschichte der Kaiserprophetie im Mittelalter,” *Historisches Jahrbuch* 19 (1898): 849–51; Lynn Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science: vols. 3–4, Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries* (New York: Columbia UP, 1934), 305–06. Prophecy (“Lilium in meliore parte...”) at BL Arundel MS 66, fol. 291v.
- 32 Margaret Enid Griffiths, *Early Vaticination in Welsh with English Parallels*, ed. T. Gwynn Jones (Cardiff: Oxford UP, 1937), 170–72.
- 33 Giedrė Mickūnaitė, *Making a Great Ruler: Grand Duke Vytautas of Lithuania* (New York: Central European UP, 2005), 50–52.
- 34 *Ibid.*, 120–21.

between the Serbian epics, poetry from the Adriatic coast, and Bosnian Muslim songs obscure the details. Sometimes, a Jesus-consonating Lazar is a “saviour” and a “good shepherd.” By the end of the fifteenth century, sometimes deep-ken poetry instead saw consonance between Jesus and the traitor, identified with the Serbian knight Miloš Obilić (d. 1389), who sacrificed himself on a suicide mission to assassinate Sultan Murad I (1326–89).<sup>35</sup>

Further east, Shah Ismail I (1487–1524), founder of the Safavid dynasty of Iran, wrote verse under the pen name Khata’i, literally meaning “The Sinner,” but perhaps also a reference to China (“Cathay”). In his *Diwan*, written to encourage his Turkomen followers to recognize his legitimacy, Ismail proclaimed that “My name is Shah Isma’il. I am God’s mystery. I am the leader of all these *ghazis*... / I am the living Khidr and Jesus, son of Mary. I am the Alexander of (my) contemporaries.” The Shah thus identified—which might be a strongly expressed consonance in a poetic idiom—with Jesus, alongside the great conqueror Alexander, as well as Khidr, the anonymous prophet described in Qur’an 18:65–82. This was in keeping with his ecumenical efforts, perhaps motivated by the need to build political bridges. His ancestors’ Christianity might have inspired identification with Jesus: he was the son of the daughter of the daughter of Calo Johannes, the penultimate Emperor of Trebizond, and his Armenian Christian mother had hidden him on Aghtamar Island in Lake Van. Although the Shah did not identify specifically with Jesus in the way contemporary Christian rulers did, when he reached for names to people his boasts, Jesus made sense, in Islamic terms and beyond.<sup>36</sup>

35 Anna Di Lellio, *The Battle of Kosovo 1389: An Albanian Epic*, trans. Robert Elsie (London: I. B. Tauris 2009); Thomas Allan Emmert, *Serbian Golgotha: Kosovo 1389* (New York: Columbia UP, 1990); John V. A. Fine, Jr., *The Late Medieval Balkans* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 409–13; Albert B. Lord, “The Battle of Kosovo in Albanian and Serbocroatian Oral Epic Songs,” in *Studies on Kosova*, ed. Arshi Pipa and Sami Repishti (New York: Columbia UP, 1984), 65–83.

36 Christiane Gruber and Frederick Colby, ed., *The Prophet’s Ascension: Cross-cultural Encounters with the Islamic Mi’raj Tales* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 2010), 315; V. Minorsky, “The Poetry of Shah Ismail I,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 10 (1942): 1006–53 (1042a). See Jean Aubin, “L’avènement des Safavides reconsidéré,” *Moyen Orient & Océan Indien* 5 (1988): 4–16; Palmira Brummett, “The Myth of Shah Ismail Safavi: Political Rhetoric and ‘Divine’ Kingship,” in *Medieval Christian Perceptions of Islam*, ed. John Victor Tolan (New York: Routledge, 1996), 331–59; Ferenc Csirkés, “A Messiah Untamed: Notes on the Philology of Shah Ismā’il’s *Dīvān*,” *Iranian Studies* 52 (2019): 339–95, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00210862.2019.1648998>; Rudi Matthee, “Christians in Safavid Iran: Hospitality and Harassment,” *Studies on Persianate Societies* 3 (2005): 3–43 (9–11); Roger M. Savory, “Relations between the Safavid State and its Non-Muslim Minorities,” *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 14 (2003): 434–58 (454), <https://doi.org/10.1080/0959641032000127597>; Wheeler Thackston, “The Divan of Khata’i: Pictures for the Poetry of Shah Isma’il,” *Asian Art* (1988): 37–63 (40, 54–60); William F. Tucker,

## Devotees

Beyond rulers and elites, a number of pious individuals—often mendicants, especially Franciscans—sought to consonate with Jesus in various ways. In this century, the two aspects of Jesus’s life that attracted the most attention were his poverty and his suffering.

Francis of Assisi (d. 1226) himself was recognized as a great Jesus imitator. The Franciscan Bartholomew Rinonico (d. ca. 1401) wrote up a treatise, approved by the order’s authorities in 1399, on the “conformities” between the lives of Jesus and Francis. The title page quotes Jesus telling any would-be follower to “take up his cross and follow me” (Mt 16:24), features an acrostic poem about Francis, and depicts Francis following Jesus, each bearing a cross. The most impressive illustration comes early in the book: the consonance between Jesus and Francis is visualized in the image of the *Arbor conformitatum* [Tree of Conformities]. The tree has forty leaves, each representing a conformity between Francis’s and Jesus’s lives.<sup>37</sup> Bartholomew also applied the INRI (or JNRJ) *titulus* to Francis: Francis was Jesus (because of his conformity), Nazarenus (as a virgin), Rex (king of own passions), Judaeorum (joyfully leading all creatures to praise God).<sup>38</sup> Recognition of such conformity went beyond religious circles: Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527) argued that it was precisely through his exemplification of Jesus that Francis revived Christianity.<sup>39</sup>

## Poverty

A number of Christians were particularly interested in poverty, especially Jesus’s. The Irish poet Tadg Óg Ó hUiginn (ca. 1370–1448) saw the long-term

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“The Kūfan Ghulāt and Millenarian (Mahdist) Movements in Mongol-Türkmen Iran,” in *Unity in Diversity: Mysticism, Messianism and the Construction of Religious Authority in Islam*, ed. Orkhan Mir-Kasimov (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 175–95 (192–93), [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004262805\\_008](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004262805_008)

- 37 “Conformatum scilicet vite Beati Francisci ad vitam Domini Nostri Jesu Christi,” in Bartolomeo da Rinonico, *Opus: Auree & inexplicabilis bonitatis & continentie* (Milan: n.p., 1510), fol. 4v. See Rossetti Edoardo, “Arbor conformitatum: Tra ‘antico’ e ‘moderno’ nelle due edizioni delle conformità di Francesco a Cristo di Bartolomeo da Pisa (1510, 1513),” *Rassegna di Studi e Notizie* 40 (2018–19): 351–66.
- 38 Bartolomeo da Pisa, *De conformitate vitae beati Francisci ad vitam Domini Jesu*, *Analecta Franciscana* 5, 2 vols. (Florence: Quaracchi, 1912), II, 378 (3.2). See Carolly Erickson, “Bartholomew of Pisa, Francis exalted: De conformitate,” *Mediaeval Studies* 34 (1972): 253–74.
- 39 Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Discourses*, trans. Leslie J. Walker and Brian Richardson (London: Penguin, 1998), 389 (3.1).



dangers of wealth and peril, and preferred “poverty as an atonement.”<sup>40</sup> Visiting Rome, a fourteen-year-old Francis of Paola (1416–1507) used reference to Jesus’s poverty to criticize the ostentatious display of the carriage and retinue of a cardinal—loudly enough that the prelate stopped to defend himself with a plain-ken appeal to human psychology: “My son, do not be scandalized; for if we did otherwise, the apostolic order would be despised and scorned by the worldly of these times.”<sup>41</sup> Wycliffe used Jesus’s poverty specifically to argue for papal imitation of Jesus, and restraint in the world: because Jesus was “the poorest man, rejecting all temporal dominion,” the pope too should surrender temporal dominion to the secular powers.<sup>42</sup>

At times, Jesus’s poverty was juxtaposed with the wealth of the Church as a whole, which could be symbolized by Mary. In one French poem (ca. 1450), Jesus sues his mother in papal court. Mary, he argues, has seized an unfair proportion of God’s inheritance, which should instead go to Jesus, as a legitimate only child. He contrasts the wealth of her houses, starting at Reims with its Cathedral of Our Lady, against the poverty of his own, which are visited only by sick people. Mary forcefully counters: God and Jesus have both left her penniless, and she was forced to work to survive, and she thus accumulated all this wealth. Jesus does not love her. She tried to set him up with property, so he could live off the rental incomes, but his obvious, continuing poverty proves his poor money-management skills. The pope rules in favour of Mary, and orders Jesus to pay court costs.<sup>43</sup>

Most controversial were people following Jesus into poverty. In its first centuries the Franciscan order saw fierce debates essentially over whether Jesus’s poverty was inherently good (deep ken), or mere happenstance without obligation on his followers (plain ken). Most theologians understood that Jesus and his closest followers held no individual property. With the deep ken, Bonaventure (1221–74) included among his evidence for Jesus’s poverty

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- 40 Tadh Óg Ó hUiginn, *Dán Dé: The Poems of Donnchadh Mór Ó Dálaigh and the Religious Poems in the Duanaire of the Yellow Book of Lecan*, ed. L. McKenna (Dublin: Educational Company of Ireland, 1922), 80 (no. 7).
- 41 “[Vita] de S. Francisco de Paula,” in *Acta Sanctorum Aprilis*, ed. Godfrey Henschen and Daniel van Papenbroek, 68 vols. (Antwerp: Cnobarum, 1675), I, 107.
- 42 John Wycliffe, “Epistola M(agistri) I(ohannis) W(yclif) missa pape Urbano,” in *Opera minora*, ed. Johann Loserth (London: Paul, 1913), 1–2. See John Wycliffe, *De Ecclesia*, ed. Johann Loserth (London: Trübner, 1886), 365–66 (16).
- 43 “The Dispute between God and His Mother,” in Barbara Newman, *Medieval Crossover: Reading the Secular against the Sacred* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press 2013), 273–86; Gérard Gros, “Questions d’héritage, ou La Desputoison de Dieu et de Sa Mère,” in *Les relations de parenté dans le monde medieval*, ed. Cristina Álvares (Aix-en-Provence: Presses universitaires de Provence, 1989), 487–507.

Ps 40:17 [39:18], written centuries before Jesus's human birth.<sup>44</sup> The plain-ken response to Jesus's property was the more innovative. Peter John Olivi (1248–98) argued that Jesus and his disciples carried a purse simply because of the historical circumstances: for travel in regions like Samaria, culturally *inhospitales* [hostile], it made sense to have money to buy food.<sup>45</sup> This plain-ken interest in the historical Jesus, as a model for imitation, would expand in later centuries in Europe, as we will see.<sup>46</sup>

The "Observant" Franciscans, who embraced this evangelical poverty, lost the debate, but endured in marginal areas unmolested. In the late 1360s, at one such redoubt, in Brogliano near Foligno, they began a new offensive under the leadership of Paoluccio Trinci, and by the end of the century they had won over some two dozen friaries. They advocated and exemplified a radical Jesus-centric perfection and poverty, but within a generation their success brought them back into worldly matters, even into the kind of intellectual scholarship that Paoluccio would have abhorred. Bernardino of Siena (1380–1444) and John of Capistrano (1386–1456) were not meek hermits, but cunning and aggressive reformers. In the decades on either side of 1400, similar Observant movements broke out among the Dominicans, alongside the regular canons, the Carmelites, and the Friars of the Holy Cross. The same energy, and sometimes the same emphasis on poverty, expanded the Carthusians, "never reformed because never deformed," and created the Jesuati and the Birgittines, the Minimi, and the Brothers and Sisters of the Common Life (see below).<sup>47</sup> Lady Zwedera of Deventer, from the

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- 44 The Psalms line is "ego autem mendicus sum et pauper." Bonaventure, *St. Bonaventure's Commentary on the Gospel of Luke, Pt. 3, Chapters 17–24*, trans. Robert J. Karris (St. Bonaventure: Franciscan Institute, 2004), 1590. See M. D. Lambert, *Franciscan Poverty* (London: SPCK, 1961), 130–33.
- 45 Olivi, *De perfectione evangelica*, in Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Borgh.357, fol. 76r–97v (quaestio 9), esp. 83r, 89r; Olivi, *Tractatus de paupertate in genere, et in specie*, in Assisi, Biblioteca del Sacro Convento, Fondo Antico MS 677, fol. 20v–22v. See David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans: From Protest to Persecution in the Century after Saint Francis* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State UP, 2001), 269; Burr, *Olivi and Franciscan Poverty* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989), 57–60, 63–64, 74–76.
- 46 Some scholars have examined the development of a kind of linear time within Christianity and considered its influence in the scientific development of Europe. See Francesco d'Arcais, Adriano Buzzati-Traverso, Arturo Carlo Jemolo, Ernesto de Martino, Raimondo Panikkar, and Ugo Spirito, "Progresso Scientifico e Contesto Culturale," *Civiltà delle macchine* 11 (1963): 19–29 (20–22); Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time: The Primitive Christian Conception of Time and History*, trans. Floyd V. Filson (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1950).
- 47 Bert Roest, "Observant Reform in Religious Orders," in *Christianity in Western Europe, c.1100–c.1500*, ed. Miri Rubin and Walter Simons, Cambridge History of Christianity 4 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2010), 447–54.

latter group, valued poverty so much that she warned against fake simulations of it, for “Poverty without need is like a letter sent to a great lord without a seal.”<sup>48</sup>

Such debates often depended on how the Gospels represented Jesus, and what implications that had for those who sought to imitate him. When Richard FitzRalph (ca. 1300–60) had insisted that, as a carpenter, Jesus would have been fairly well-off, William Woodford (d. ca. 1400) in his *Defensorium* (1390s) disagreed: that Jesus was called a “carpenter” did not make him a carpenter, for the Gospels report many names misapplied to Jesus, including “seducer,” “drunkard,” and “demon-possessed.” Woodford made a deep-ken argument: if Jesus were a labourer, then bishops would themselves, following him, labour, which they obviously did not. He more broadly advocated caution in the imitation of just the historical Jesus: emulating Jesus was not the whole of perfection, because many perfect acts postdated Jesus, who would not have been able, for example, to make the sign of the cross. Christians would be fools to literally ape Jesus by, say, being crucified, cursing trees, or drowning pigs.<sup>49</sup>

A similar debate was fought in other settings. In 1400 and 1405, the Dominican Johannes Mulberg (d. 1414) preached in Basel against pious lay women begging in imitation of Jesus’s poverty. The Franciscan Rudolf Buchsmann pushed back: Jesus’s example authorized this beloved mendicant poverty, and therefore such beggars should receive their due, just as labourers were justly paid. The Dominican theologian Johannes Nider (1380–1438), a follower of Jean Gerson (1363–1429), defended Beguine poverty, and lay poverty more generally, at the Council of Basel. Nider asserted that even lay people should adopt poverty “for” Jesus, following Jesus’s example. In effect, Nider created a hierarchy: poverty for Jesus was superior to labour, which was superior to involuntary poverty. Ironically, Nider’s hierarchy places the greater deep-ken significance on voluntary poverty. He further subdivided the top step: religious-order poverty for Jesus was superior to lay poverty for Jesus.<sup>50</sup>

48 D. A. Brinkerink, ed., *Van den doechden der vuriger ende stichtiger susteren van Diepen Veen* (Groningen: Wolters, 1904), 49.

49 Oxford, Magdalen College, MS 75, fol. 100v–02r, 108r, 137r–38r, 152rv. See Bridget Riley, “Christ’s Poverty in Antimendicant Debate: Book VIII of *De pauperie saluatoris* by Richard FitzRalph, and William Woodford’s *Defensorium*” (PhD thesis, University of Reading, 2019).

50 Nider, *De paupertate*, in BSB Clm 18195, fol. 244vb, 255vb. See Michael D. Bailey, “Abstinence and Reform at the Council of Basel: Johannes Nider’s *De abstinentia esus carniuum*,” *Mediaeval Studies* 59 (1997): 225–60; Michael D. Bailey, “Religious Poverty, Mendicancy, and Reform in the Late Middle Ages,” *Church History* 72 (2003): 466–73, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009640700100319>; Alexander Patschovsky, “Straßburger Beginenverfolgungen im 14. Jahrhundert,” *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters* 30 (1974): 57–198; Hans-Jochen Schiewer, “Preaching and Pastoral Care of a Devout Woman (*deo*

Jacob of Nouvion represented the University of Paris at a 1408 Prague summit between the French and the Bohemians, a meeting intended to make progress on the papal schism. Over dinner, Jacob got caught up in a local hot issue, priestly poverty. Jacob pointed out that Jesus only advised poverty, but did not actually require it. The Bohemians trapped him with a Bible, and Jacob conceded that priests did not have to do everything that Jesus merely advised. This was outrageous to the Bohemians, for whom any clear teaching by Jesus must be followed.<sup>51</sup>

The Dominican preacher Johann Herolt (d. 1468), called “Discipulus,” argued that any beggar was “Jesus Christ in the guise of the pauper, and you should consider it is to Him that you give it.” Poverty was so deeply tied to Jesus that anyone in it necessarily imitated him. We could see the consonance with poverty and modesty, Herolt explained, in many aspects of his life: “The mean rags of Christ reprove costliness, the harsh straw on which Christ lay reproves softness, and Christ’s narrow manger reproves big, wide beds and cushions.” Indeed, “he held to abstinence from his very entry into the world: he was born in winter, in the middle of the night, was placed in a manger on straw, in adult life never wore shoes or linen but only a seamless tunic, and never ate any meat except the paschal lamb.” Herolt thus establishes a deep-ken consonance between beggars and Jesus, who was not merely criticizing wealth but was embodying a criticism of it.<sup>52</sup>

## Nudity

Christian theologians had long linked poverty and nudity to Jesus. Jerome (d. 420) had written of nakedness and poverty, *nudus nudum Christum sequi* [to follow naked the naked Christ]. This and similar pronouncements often understood this nudity as a mere metaphor for poverty, or at least frugality. Breaking with tradition, Francis of Assisi took nudity literally. The late medieval period saw

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*devota*) in Fifteenth-Century Basel,” in *Medieval Christianity in Practice*, ed. Miri Rubin (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2009), 126–32 (130), <https://doi.org/10.1515/978140083377>

- 51 Jacob of Nouvion, *Disputatio cum Hussitis*, ed. Joannes Sedlák (Brno: Benedictinorum Rajhradiensium, 1914), 21.
- 52 Johannes Herolt, *Sermones Discipuli de tempore et de sanctis* (Strassburg: n.p., 1484), fol. 41vb–42rb. Translation from Ian D. K. Siggins, *A Harvest of Medieval Preaching: The Sermon Books of Johann Herolt, OP (Discipulus)* (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris Corp., 2009), 129.

an increased emphasis on the suffering of the naked and human Jesus.<sup>53</sup> One fourteenth-century Franciscan poet asked to be “clad in Christ’s skin.”<sup>54</sup>

Poverty was just one facet of wider debates on Jesus’s nudity. St. Bridget’s Revelations (see Chapter 12) included the shepherds demanding to see Jesus’s genitals, as confirmation of his identity, for the angels had announced the birth of the world’s saviour, not its “saviouress.” Upon the gender reveal, the shepherds “immediately adored him with great reverence and joy.” According to Bridget and Pseudo-Bonaventure, someone (an anonymous bystander according to the former, Mary according to the latter) covered up Jesus’s genitals on the cross.<sup>55</sup> Gerson worried that a naked Jesus image might provoke lust.<sup>56</sup> In 1499, Jakob Wimpfeling (1450–1528) wondered whether Jesus’s genitals were exposed on the cross, in view of his own mother, against “decorum and honesty.” Reaching back to Capistrano and Gerson, he found good arguments for and against this, but insisted the topic was not to be discussed in the presence of women. Johannes von Paltz (d. 1513) largely agreed, and denounced preachers who mentioned Jesus’s nudity, for “such a preacher strips the Lord before a multitude of people.”<sup>57</sup> (See Chapter 15.)

One Friday morning, in the first decade of the 1400s, Bernardino of Siena stripped naked, bore a heavy cross on his shoulders, and, followed by twelve naked friars, entered the Tuscan town of Seggiano to preach the Passion, “all

53 Philipp Fehl, “The Naked Christ in Santa Maria Novella in Florence: Reflections on an Exhibition and the Consequences,” *Storia dell’Arte* 45 (1982): 161–64; Franco Mormando, “‘Nudus nudum Christum sequi’: The Franciscans and Differing Interpretations of Male Nakedness in Fifteenth-Century Italy,” *Fifteenth-Century Studies* 33 (2008): 171–97.

54 John of Grimestone, Order of Friars Minor, in a 1372 collection “I would be Clad in Christ’s Skin,” in *English Verse, 1300–1500*, ed. John Burrow (London: Longman, 1977), 31.

55 *The Revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden*, trans. Denis Searby, ed. Bridget Morris, 4 vols. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008–12), I, 68, III, 253; Pseudo-Bonaventure, *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, trans. Isa Ragusa and Rosalie B. Green (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1961), 333 (ch. 78). See Vida J. Hull, “The Sex of the Savior in Renaissance Art: The Revelations of Saint Bridget and the Nude Christ Child in Renaissance Art,” *Studies in Iconography* 15 (1993): 77–112.

56 Jean Gerson [attributed], *Tractatus pro devotis simplicibus*, in Düsseldorf, Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek, MS B. 204, fol. 197v–98r.

57 Johann von Paltz, *Coelifodina*, ed. Christoph Burger and Friedhelm Stash (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1983), 52. See Gustav Knod, “Jacob Wimpfeling und Daniel Zankenried: Ein Streit über die Passion Christi,” *Archiv für Literaturgeschichte* 14 (1886): 1–16; Richard C. Trexler, “Gendering Jesus Crucified,” in *Iconography at the Crossroads*, ed. Brendan Cassidy (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1993), 107–20.

drunk with the spirit.”<sup>58</sup> Bernardino’s contemporaries called him “naked” (presumably at least partly as a metaphor), and he himself noted that Jesus was naked both at birth and death,<sup>59</sup> an intentional coincidence that invited further participation in that nudity.

Attitudes progressively hardened; authorities became less tolerant: was this pious deep-ken resonance with Jesus, or plain-ken perversion? Some authorities interpreted this nudity symbolically, but were offended by its dissonance with Jesus’s dignity. In 1412, naked pilgrims, expecting the sea to part for them, walked on foot toward Jerusalem for the apocalypse. They made it as far as Fermo, of the Italian Marche, before being arrested for indecency.<sup>60</sup> Other authorities interpreted the nudity with more of the plain ken than it was intended, and read it as sexual deviance. In 1420, four Franciscan friars processed naked through the streets of Venice while carrying crosses. Pious nudity was still socially acceptable enough that some laymen could join the nude friars. The city government, however, was uncertain. The men were in fact arrested, but eventually exonerated, as “their deeds were not carried out with any evil intention.” Their own superiors then put them under house arrest. In 1438, members of a confraternity in Venice were arrested for flagellating each other naked in the church of Santa Maria Zobenigo. Four were convicted and sentenced to terms in prison in chains and banishment.<sup>61</sup>

Even Bernardino, our first nudist example, by the 1430s and 1440s clearly associated nudity—except the modesty of bare feet—with sin and evil. He became obsessed with sexuality. In one sermon he talked about someone who “when contemplating the humanity of Christ hanging on the cross—shameful to say and horrendous to even think—carnally and repulsively polluted and fouled himself.”<sup>62</sup> His horror about sex does not seem to have stopped him from talking frequently about sex: Bernardino’s earthy description of the wife’s “obligation to give her husband what he asks for, every occasion, at every time, in every way” prompted some women to walk out of a sermon, with him calling out after them, “Don’t go; don’t leave; wait, you might hear things that

58 Piero Misciattelli, ed., *Le più belle pagine di Bernardino de Siena* (Milan: Fratelli Treves, 1926), 281–82. See Mormando, “Nudus nudum Christum sequi,” 180.

59 Bernardino of Siena, *Opera omnia*, 9 vols. (Florence: Quaracchi, 1956), V, 104–05. See Ferdinand Delorme, “Une esquisse primitive de la vie de S. Bernardin,” *Bulletino di studi bernardiniani* 1 (1935): 1–22 (12–13).

60 Bernardino of Siena, *Le prediche volgari*, ed. Luciano Banchi, 3 vols. (Siena: Tip. Edit. all’inseg. di S. Bernardino, 1884), II, 374.

61 Guido Ruggiero, *The Boundaries of Eros: Sex, Crime, and Sexuality in Renaissance Venice* (New York: Oxford UP, 1989), 140–41; Mormando, “Nudus nudum Christum sequi,” 178.

62 Bernardino of Siena, *Opera omnia*, VI, 259.

you've never heard before."<sup>63</sup> The man who once had a deep-ken appreciation of nudity's appropriateness had finally taken up a plain ken so earthly that he could offend ears expecting decorum while being himself offended by the dissonance between the nude and the holy.

Nevertheless, nudity and whips endured. Late in the fifteenth century, one confraternity in Florence regularly performed a special flagellation ceremony: with the lights extinguished, one would speak about the impermanence of life and the need for zeal. After a silent period, the naked confraternity members would whip themselves "for the space of saying five paternosters and Ave Marias." This was followed by prayers and psalms.<sup>64</sup>

### Suffering

The flagellation these enthusiasts combined with poverty was one part of a larger suite of Jesus-inspired suffering, often associated with religious confraternities, who were prominent Jesus-imitators around 1400. Self-flagellation was at the heart of their labours. Almost half of the men in San Sepolcro in the 1420s belonged to flagellant confraternities. The Gonfalone confraternity (see above) adopted flagellant practices by 1400. Their flagellant processions preceded the Passion Plays they produced in the Colosseum. Eventually, their *flagellationi* procession expanded as other fraternities' members joined in, and the destination was moved to St. Peter's Basilica. Some half of the roughly two hundred participants flagellated themselves, using ropes knotted and studded with metal. By 1500, the Gonfalone restricted flagellation to Good Friday, although they kept their whips as part of their habit. In Venice and Florence, conspicuous displays of wealth increasingly pushed penance aside from the Holy Week ceremonies. Nobles hired substitutes to replace them in the procession. Contemporary cynics expressed surprise that nobles were even that penitent, but in the deep ken the substitutes enabled the nobles' participation, rather than detracting from it. Some confraternities concluded the flagellation with communal requests for forgiveness and a washing ceremony, in which a ranking official would wash the feet of each member, before a symbolic Last Supper. A member might read the corresponding gospel passage as the confraternal brothers were enacting a scene. The literal imitation of Christ thus served as a deep-ken recreation of

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63 Bernardino of Siena, *Le prediche volgari*, II, 135.

64 Biblioteca Riccardiana Florence, MS 2566, fol. 7v. See John Henderson, "Penitence and the Laity in Fifteenth-Century Florence," in *Christianity and the Renaissance: Image and Religious Imagination in the Quattrocento*, ed. Timothy Verdon (Tallahassee, FL: Florida State University School of Visual Arts, 1985), 229–49 (241).

Jesus's history in a new time and place.<sup>65</sup> Their self-flagellation resonated with the Passion, their banquets with the Last Supper. The consonance suggests deep-ken meaning, and following Jesus's teachings the plain ken.

Some suffering was not ritualized, but still understood in a Jesus context. Late September 1412 saw the arrival in Prague of the papal decree that Bethlehem be destroyed. German parishioners of another local church put on armour, armed themselves with swords, halberds, and crossbows, and marched against Bethlehem. That chapel now faced a new massacre, and a new Passion. There, Jan Hus (ca. 1370–1415) was preaching as they stormed the building. "Let the bishops and priests of the supreme bishop send after me, as they had sent after Jesus," he later remembered. Somehow the preacher's words or his audience's determination disarmed and unnerved the invaders. They left to plot their next move and left Hus to marvel, "Consider the German audacity: they would not dare to pull down a neighbour's oven or a stable without the king's permission, and they would dare to attempt [to destroy] God's Church!" Hus later compared the near-miss to an event in Jesus's life, where his would-be arresting party ended up listening to him instead (Jn 8:12–20): "For they came inopportunistly. The bishops had sent after the Lord Jesus when he preached; but because His hour had not yet come, therefore the servants of the bishops preferred to listen to Him rather than to seize Him. Likewise the hour of my death has not yet come..."<sup>66</sup>

The desired consonance could also be emotional. Antoninus of Florence (1389–1459) urged daily meditation on the Passion while kneeling before a crucifix. Then "with the eyes of the mind, rather than those of the body," you should contemplate "first, at the crown of thorns, pressed into his head down to the skull; then the eyes, full of tears, blood, and sweat; then the nose, full of snot,

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65 James R. Banker, "Death and Christian Charity in the Confraternities of the Upper Tiber Valley," in *Christianity and the Renaissance*, ed. Verdon, 302–27 (316, 320); Peter Burke, *The Italian Renaissance* (London: Polity, 1987), 219; Henderson, "Penitence and the Laity," 242–43; Nerida Newbiggin, "The Decorum of the Passion: The Plays of the Confraternity of the Gonfalone in the Roman Colosseum, 1490–1539," in *Confraternities and the Visual Arts in Renaissance Italy: Ritual, Spectacle, Image*, ed. Barbara Wisch and Diane Cole Ahl (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2000), 173–202; Barbara Wisch and Nerida Newbiggin, *Acting on Faith: The Confraternity of the Gonfalone in Renaissance Rome* (Philadelphia, PA: Saint Joseph's UP, 2013); Barbara Wisch, "The Passion of Christ in the Art, Theater, and Penitential Rituals of the Roman Confraternity of the Gonfalone," in *Crossing the Boundaries: Christian Piety and the Arts in Italian Medieval and Renaissance Confraternities*, ed. Konrad Eisenbichler (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute, 1991), 237–62 (237–41, 253–54).

66 Matthew Spinka, *John Hus at the Council of Constance* (New York: Columbia UP, 1965), 244–45.



tears, and blood; the mouth, full of gall, drool, and blood; the beard, similarly full of drool, blood, and gall...<sup>67</sup> In the 1470s in Florence, Giovanni Nesi (ca. 1456–1522), a future Girolamo Savonarola (1452–98) supporter, called upon his audience to consider Jesus's Passion: "From the head to the feet every part of his suffered," namely:

the holiest head from biting thorns, the shining eyes from the darkening bandage, the mellifluous mouth from the bitterest bile, the resplendent face from bloody sweat, the weak shoulders from the most heavy weight of the cross, the most sacred chest from the sharp lance, the innocent hands and the immaculate feet from sharpened nails, and finally all his precious body from the harshest blows.

In total, it was impossible to count the "innumerable number" of these outrages, because "there was no point of health anywhere in his divine body."<sup>68</sup> In a Holy Thursday sermon, Angelo Poliziano (1454–94) explained that the dead Jesus, taken from the cross, encouraged his audience

to weep with him in his sourest suffering, to keep company with his holy wife, a disconsolate widow, with his sorrowful mother whose soul is pierced with a knife, to mourn his incomparable torment, even with the stones, with the sun, with the heavens, with the earth, with all the elements, with all the world, to savour the bitter taste—but to us beneficial—of his arduous passion, to kneel, to bow down, to lay down at his holiest feet [...] Let us cry tenderly, my devout fathers, let us cry bitterly for the death of sweet Jesus...<sup>69</sup>

## Envoi

We close with the most complex and dramatic case of Jesus resemblances. Jesus ruled Florence amidst a controversial moral and verbal consonance with Savonarola (see Chapter 5). A thin, dangerous line separated Savonarola's insistence that he spoke only what Jesus said and the blasphemous assertion that both men spoke the same thing. Some opponents suspected demonic

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67 Antoninus of Florence, *Opera a ben vivere* (Florence: Cellini, 1858), 169–70.

68 Olga Zorzi Pugliese, "Two Sermons by Giovanni Nesi and the Language of Spirituality in Late Fifteenth-Century Florence," *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 42 (1980): 641–56 (648–49).

69 Angelo Ambrogini Poliziano, *Prose volgari inedite e poesie latine e greche edite e inedite*, ed. Isidoro del Lungo (Florence: Barbèra 1867), 7.

possession. In one sermon, Savonarola marvelled that because God “certainly” would not let him be deceived, he could declare, “I do not have a demon” possessing him. The fact that Jesus had said those same words when he was accused of demonic possession (Jn 8:49) created a consonance that confirmed the truth of his utterance.<sup>70</sup> His critics accused him of claiming publicly and repeatedly that “Jesus Christ and God lies if he lies.”<sup>71</sup> Savonarola wrote out performance notes for his sermons, including, “Pull out a nail [from the Crucifix], and let his [Jesus’s] right arm fall,” before explaining to Jesus that his falling arm represented God’s abandonment of the Jews.<sup>72</sup> This was highly effective. One sermon worked up to a finale where he violently faced the crucifix and cried out his readiness to imitate Jesus by dying, and his audience exploded in shouts of “Long live Jesus Christ, our King!”<sup>73</sup>

Jesus resemblance sometimes struck onlookers as excessive or wrongheaded. Presumably to punish Savonarola for presenting himself too closely with Jesus, opponents sneaked into the cathedral to embed nails in the pulpit, so that the next morning when the preacher pounded his fists he would be driving them into nails. For good measure they put feces on the pulpit as well, and topped it all with the putrefying hide of a donkey, perhaps another Jesus reference.<sup>74</sup> Some contemporaries were taken aback by such violence in relation to Jesus, especially in the context of an execution. At the end of the century, one *converso* in Spain struggled to understand the fascination with Jesus’s Passion. Framing it with plain-ken human terms, Pedro Nuñez de Santa Fe noted (ca. 1502) that “when they kill a brother or relative, especially if he’s executed as punishment, they don’t want it mentioned,” but Christians could not refrain from talking about Jesus’s Crucifixion as a criminal.<sup>75</sup>

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- 70 Savonarola, *Il Quaresimale del 1491: La certezza profetica di un mondo nuovo*, ed. Armando F. Verde and Elettra Giaconi (Florence: SISMEL edizioni del Galluzzo, 2001), 212.
- 71 Savonarola, *Le Lettere*, ed. Roberto Ridolfi (Florence: Olshki, 1933): 80–91. See Francesco Altoviti, “In Defensione de’ magistrati e delle leggi e antiche cerimonie,” in *‘Questa è la terra tua’: Savonarola a Firenze*, ed. Gian Carlo Garfagnini (Florence: SISMEL edizioni del Galluzzo, 2000), 140–47 (144); Giacinto A. Scaltriti, *L’Ultimo Savonarola* (Rome: Paoline, 1976), 51.
- 72 Savonarola, *Il Quaresimale*, 276.
- 73 Savonarola, *Prediche sopra Amos a Zaccaria*, ed. P. Ghiglieri, 3 vols. (Rome: Belardetti, 1971–72), II, 109.
- 74 Pacifico Burlamacchi [attributed], *La vita del Beato Ieronimo Savonarola*, ed. Piero Ginori Conti (Florence: Leo S. Olshki, 1937), 107–09; Pasquale Villari, *La storia di Girolamo Savonarola e de’suoi tempi*, 2 vols. (Florence: Succ. Le Monnier, 1898), II, 19. See Lauro Martines, *Fire in the City: Savonarola and the Struggle for Renaissance Florence* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006), 27, 94–96, 128, 163.
- 75 Carlos Carrete Parrondo, ed., *El Tribunal de la Inquisición en el Obispado de Soria (1486–1502)* (Salamanca: Universidad Pontificia, 1987), 90.



## 20. Intimacy with Jesus

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The late-fourteenth-century poem “Christus und die minnende Seele” [Christ and the Loving Soul] describes an intimate, savage relationship between the two title personages. The Soul, saying her bedtime prayers, reveals that she is considering a worldly opportunity, presumably a human husband. Jesus soon arrives to wake her up, to explain that he would make a much better husband: “I mean to bend you over here and beat you on your back, from which you’ll hesitate to defend yourself... I can do what I want.” Jesus uses consecrated wine as a love-potion to excite the Soul. He cripples and blinds her, as it is better to “come blind into heaven than painfully into hell with two eyes.” He strips her, to help her break her addiction to social esteem. She complains that without clothes she cannot attend church, but he repeatedly warns her against going: “Don’t go to the chapel, so you can stay home and sit at the oven, on the stone” floor. In despair, she retorts, that if she “should have to go naked,” she would rather hang herself. Jesus silences her, saying “That might well happen to you,” and then hangs her. Even within the poem there is some sense that Jesus is behaving badly. He justifies his actions, meeting her objections with the reminder that she herself had said she wanted to be hung. He also defends his blinding her, which he did so that she “would not forget him.”<sup>1</sup>

A number of images illustrate versions of the poem, some depicting Jesus bearing the cross, linked by a rope to the Soul (personified as a woman), following him while bearing her own cross. In one example the woman wears a red mantel, suggesting a worldly orientation (see Fig. 20.1). In another, a devil is whispering into her ear.

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1 Romuald Banz, ed., *Christus und die Minnende Seele: Untersuchungen und Texte* (Breslau: Marcus, 1908), 284, 288, 291, 304–05. See Rabia Gregory, “Marrying Jesus: Brides and the Bridegroom in Medieval Women’s Religious Literature” (PhD thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2007), 164–76; Rabia Gregory, *Marrying Jesus in Medieval and Early Modern Northern Europe: Popular Culture and Religious Reform* (London: Routledge, 2016), 51–59, 85–100.



Fig. 20.1 *Kreuztragende Minne* (ca. 1490), Einsiedeln, Stiftsbibliothek, Cod. 710(322), fol. 1r, Wikimedia, public domain, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Einsiedeln\\_Stiftsbibliothek\\_Codex\\_710\\_\(322\)\\_1r.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Einsiedeln_Stiftsbibliothek_Codex_710_(322)_1r.jpg)

The ease with which historians can read these relationships as abusive, in such human terms, suggests their inclination towards the plain ken. Recently, scholars have suggested this dialogue is “compassionate and humorous”<sup>2</sup> with a “delicate irony and a thoroughly loving tone,”<sup>3</sup> but it is also possible to read the poem in a fifteenth-century voice filled with deadly urgency to submit to Jesus.

This particular marriage lived in a poem, but similar Jesus-relationships took place in reality. The previous chapter presented actors, kings, and religious enthusiasts who resembled Jesus either in their own behaviour or in later accounts of their lives. This chapter shifts to three groups of Jesus cultists who chose intimacy over imitation, making use of both kens to achieve kinds of closeness that could become domestic and even sexual. We begin with a group of female mystics, from England to Ethiopia, who cultivated extraordinary relationships with Jesus. Second, the Modern Devout are considered, who lived in regulated communities, sometimes involving spiritual nudity and marriage alongside more modest activities like yarn-spinning and prayer. Finally, we examine Hafiz of Shiraz (1325–90) and other Muslim poets, who spun lyrics celebrating comely boys bearing stupor-inducing wine and life-giving Jesus-breath.

2 Elina Gertsman, “Wandering Wounds: The Urban Body in *Imitatio Christi*,” in *Wounds and Repair*, ed. Tracy and DeVries, 340–66 (343), [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004306455\\_017](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004306455_017)

3 Peter Parshall and Rainer Schoch, *Origins of European Printmaking: Fifteenth-Century Woodcuts and their Public* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 2005), 280 (cat. 87).

## Mystics

Through combining the two kens, mystics could have a direct and powerful experience of intimacy with Jesus, who was effectively brought into their fifteenth-century lives. The route to bridge the past was made possible by meditation handbooks, a flourishing genre in our period. These focused on the narrative of Jesus's life story, and approached it analytically, by breaking it down into its constituent parts. They urged readers to exclude external sensory inputs, and instead to cultivate an emotional engagement with Jesus's life.<sup>4</sup>

Ludolph of Saxony (ca. 1295–1378) wrote a *Life of Christ* that coupled a narrative with extensive commentary to help readers project themselves into temporal Biblical history. This was an older technology that Ludolph helped popularize. Indeed, his work was based on a life of Jesus by the Italian mendicant Michael of Massa (d. 1337), which in turn had been based on that of Pseudo-Bonaventure (see Chapter 4). Ludolph cultivated a devotion both interior and corporal, “by stretching the hands or the eyes to the cross,” with genuflections and, if useful, self-flagellation. He advised the reader to remove “all other cares and concerns” and then cultivate “all your mental emotion, diligently, delightfully.” Then the time travel began. You should “render yourself present” to Jesus's life, and engage with the scenes “as if you hear with your own ears and saw with your own eyes.” Despite these being historical, you must “meditate upon all these as if they were in the present.” As a result of this process, you would experience Jesus's actions as “savory and delicious.” When describing the Mocking, for example, Ludolph asked, “What, then, would you do if you saw this? Would you not throw yourself on the Lord, saying, ‘Stop already! Do not go such evil to my Lord. Here I am—do it to me’” instead. Then when you weep, “you can use those tears to rinse the spit off Jesus's face.”<sup>5</sup> Ludolph's *Life* was long influential. Queen Isabella I of Castile (1451–1504) was keen on meditation on the *Life*, and especially the Passion, and in 1493 was impatient to see it translated into Spanish.<sup>6</sup>

A later work in the Ludolph tradition was the *Giardino de oratione fructuoso* [Garden of Fruitful Prayer]. It proved popular and was repeatedly reprinted for over a century. The intent was, again, to help readers meditate on the life and virtues of Jesus. The author invited readers to hold Jesus's life in their memories,

4 Richard C. Trexler, “Gendering Jesus Crucified,” in *Iconography at the Crossroads*, ed. Brendan Cassidy (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1993), 107–20.

5 Ludolphus de Saxonía, *Vita Jesu Christi*, ed. L. M. Rigollot, 4 vols. (Paris: Palmé, 1878), I, 7; IV, 4, 44–45 (part 2.2, ch. 60).

6 Peggy K. Liss, *Isabel the Queen* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 313.

as if it were the paternoster. He emphasized the importance of familiarity with the entirety of Jesus's earthly life, from Nativity to Ascension, for all thirty-three years, "all his acts, and customs, and virtues." You could then create consonance between your present life and Jesus's historical life: "It will be useful to you to for model in your mind [*formarti nella mente*] the places, grounds, and rooms where he conversed, and the people who were individually in his company," like Mary and the twelve apostles. By meditating "slowly, ruminating on each particular thing" you would be able to "fall in love more warmly" with Jesus.<sup>7</sup>

The tactics developed by such texts, put into practice, created connections of intimacy that recognized and transcended historical distance. At the Diepenveen convent near Deventer, Salome van den Wiel taught Alijt Comhaer (d. 1452) how to engineer good dreams by showing her, as she fell asleep, how "to lie on the breast of our dear lord to suckle his bottomless love and kindness." The technique was successful, and the nun had a "sweet dream" as a result.<sup>8</sup>

In addition to the verbal imagery of such suffering, images were used to help people cultivate mindfulness of Jesus's life in preparation for becoming closer to it. The Franciscan preacher Stephan Fridolin (d. 1498) developed a set of antipodal images, pairing triumphal and abased scenes from Jesus's life, into a seven-hundred-page devotional text, the *Schatzbehalter* [Treasury]. This was published in 1491, with woodcut illustrations from the workshop of Wolgemut and Pleydenwurff.<sup>9</sup> One pair of illustrations mapped one hundred discrete points, corresponding to moments from Jesus's life, onto a pair of hands, a handy device for memorizing them. Another woodcut shows the left hand with Jesus and Mary on the thumb, and the twelve disciples divided up among the four fingers (see Fig. 20.2).<sup>10</sup> Another manuscript includes meditations on the life of Jesus, for mnemonic purposes each linked to a different part of Jesus's body, illustrated on a image of the Crucifixion.<sup>11</sup>

7 Nicolaus da Osimo, *Giardino de oratione fructuoso* (Venice: Simone Bevilacqua, c. 1496), 59v–60r, 69r.

8 D. A. Brinkerink, ed., *Van den doechden der vuriger ende stichtiger susteren van Diepen Veen* (Groningen: Wolters, 1904), 275.

9 Stephan Fridolin, *Schatzbehalter* (Nuremberg: Anton Koberger, 1491). See Almut Breitenbach and Stefan Matter, "Image, Text, and Mind: Franciscan Tertiaries Rewriting Stephan Fridolin's *Schatzbehalter* in the Pütrichkloster in Munich," in *Nuns' Literacies in Medieval Europe: The Antwerp Dialogue*, ed. Virginia Blanton, Veronica O'Mara, and Patricia Stoop (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017), 297–316. Some exemplars are at "F-263" (12 June 2019), *Bayerische Staatsbibliothek*, [https://inkunabeln.digitale-sammlungen.de/Ausgabe\\_F-263.html](https://inkunabeln.digitale-sammlungen.de/Ausgabe_F-263.html)

10 A similar illustration is in *Origins of European Printmaking*, ed. Parshall and Schoch, 292–95 (no. 92).

11 BSB Clm 4425, fol. 165r. The text explains that the twenty visualized wounds represent the full 5,455 wounds revealed to Bridget. See David S. Areford, *The*



Fig. 20.2 *Left and Right Hands*, *Schatzbehalter*, Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, CC0 1.0, <https://art.thewalters.org/detail/13698/schatzbehalter-der-wahren-reichtumer-des-heils/>

A number of enthusiasts were nuns in the reformed Schönensteinback convent near Wittenheim in Alsace. Bedridden with illness, Clara of Ostren (d. 1447) re-envisioned her room into the Bethlehem stable where Jesus was born. She “placed” Jesus and his parents in one corner, recognized the door as leading to the shepherds, and the three windows as roads for the three Magi. Hearing a commotion beyond the windows, a caregiver asked the nun what she thought the noise was. Clara answered in first-century terms: “The lords from the Orient have received a message from the angel that they must not return to Herod. They are going straight home.” Sister Margaretha’s (d. 1442) last words were an excited “Jesus is here! Jesus is here!”<sup>12</sup>

Sometimes, a more deep-ken approach endured, but even that was deeply enmeshed in daily life. At Schönensteinback, Clara assigned spiritual meanings to various articles of clothing (see Table 20.1). These pairings were carefully chosen to link each article with a consonant object from the Passion, and her

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*Viewer and the Printed Image in Late Medieval Europe* (Farnham: Asghate, 2010), 88–91. This text has flip-over woodcuts of the Nativity attached at 156v, and the woodcut facing 156r uses the alphabet to key wounds on a Crucifixion to meditations on the text.

12 Johannes Meyer, *Women’s History in the Age of Reformation: Johannes Meyer’s Chronicle of the Dominican Observance*, trans. Claire Taylor Jones (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2019), 104–05, 128–29.



purpose was to fill the nuns' lives with reminders of Jesus's life, and thus "to orient their lives around virtue and devotion."<sup>13</sup>

| CLOTHING ITEM              | CORRESPONDING ASPECT OF JESUS'S PASSION           |
|----------------------------|---|
| wimple                     | blindfold   |
| first veil                 | loincloth that Mary gave Jesus at the Crucifixion |
| over-veil ( <i>peffe</i> ) | crown of thorns                                   |
| second veil                | tombstone   |
| under-tunic                | white robe Herod gave Jesus                       |
| belt                       | rope tying Jesus to column                        |
| scapular                   | cloth wrapping Jesus's corpse before burial       |
| cappa                      | burial shroud                                     |

Table 20.1 Clara of Ostren's Clothing Interpretation.

Similarly, another nun named Margareta (d. 1428) understood her illness, with a deep ken, as being infused with meaning: when God wanted "to take his dear child from this world, he wanted to prepare her well and gave her a difficult illness," with symptoms including a stinking gangrenous leg. Still, the ultimate purpose was a psychological transformation occurring in this life. If a nurse's mishandling of her leg caused her to yelp, Margareta would denounce herself, "you poor sinner and evil-smelling sack! Why are you not thinking about the miserable hanging of our dear Lord Jesus Christ on three nails on the holy cross without any comfort?"<sup>14</sup>

These mystic women shared and intensified the interest in Jesus's suffering, especially that from his Passion. In particular, the saintly sought pain.<sup>15</sup> Julian of Norwich (d. after 1416), who longed for "God's gift" of a nearly fatal "bodily sickness," had visions of the Passion only after becoming sick and paralyzed from the waist down.<sup>16</sup> Catherine of Siena's (1347–80) "stigmata" was internal pains. Camilla Battista da Varano (1458–1524) was physically ill and depressed. Dorothea of Montau (1347–94) nailed herself to the walls to consonate Jesus's

13 Ibid., 102–03.

14 Ibid., 172–73.

15 See Esther Cohen, *The Modulated Scream: Pain in Late Medieval Culture* (Chicago, IL: Chicago UP, 2009).

16 Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, trans. Elizabeth Spearing (London: Penguin, 1998), 4–5, 43–44.

death. For these women, even sickness became a positive good, a sign of consonance with the divine. A greater suffering, however, occurred in marriage.

## Jesus Marriages

A number of female mystics from this period understood themselves to be, in various ways, married to Jesus. During the century centred on 1400, most, but not all, European women claiming direct communications from God were laywomen. The lay element had been slowly developing over the last couple centuries, with increasingly frequent visions of Christ. Catherine of Siena had married Jesus using his foreskin as a wedding ring. Others included Constance of Rabastens (d. ca. 1385), Marie Robine (d. 1399), Jeanne-Marie of Maille (1331 Jeanne-Marie of Maille 1414), and the nun Chiara Gambacorta of Pisa (d. ca. 1419).<sup>17</sup>

None of these brides married in a vacuum: they drew on previous experience, and influenced each other. Margery Kempe (ca. 1373–1438) found inspiration in Dorothea of Montau, who in turn found inspiration in Bridget of Sweden (ca. 1303–73).<sup>18</sup> Hearing sermons from Observant Franciscans influenced Camilla Battista da Varano as a child. Nevertheless, each of these women negotiated a very individual relationship with Jesus, just as in a real marriage. Many were not virgins, and some took Jesus as a second husband, which created space for complications and idiosyncrasies beyond those of monogamous human–human marriages today.<sup>19</sup>

Some preachers pointedly contrasted a Jesus husband with a more mundane one. For example, Jan Hus (ca. 1370–1415) described Jesus as an ideal husband, a description revealing his expectations of what young women sought in a spouse: “He does not defile, violate, or trouble his wives, does not grow old, never becomes faithless to them, nor can He grow old and faithless to them.”

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17 Catherine of Siena, *Il dialogo di S. Caterina da Siena*, ed. Girolamo Gigli (Rome: Monte Citorio, 1866), 314–15. See Dyan Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage: Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP 1993), 375; Ann M. Roberts, “Chaira Gambacorta of Pisa as Patroness of the Arts,” in *Creative Women in Medieval and Early Modern Italy*, ed. E. Ann Matter and John W. Coakley (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 120–54; Claire L. Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2001), 20; André Vauchez, *The Laity in the Middle Ages*, ed. Daniel E. Bornstein, trans. Margery J. Schneider (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993), 205–15, 221–25, 258–61, 328–29.

18 Ute Stargardt, “The Influences of Dorothea von Montau on the Mysticism of Margery Kempe” (PhD thesis, University of Tennessee, 1981).

19 See Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage*, 132–94, 253–54; Gregory, *Marrying*, 145–67, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315594040>

Wives should not be tempted from the ideal to a lesser husband, for “if he is good-looking, you will fear that he would go after another; if he is ugly, there is distress; if he is a drunkard, irascible, or otherwise evilly disposed, there is hell enough.” Furthermore, “if he sires a child, there is suffering in pregnancy, in the birth, and the upbringing; if there is no issue, it brings disgrace, sorrow, and useless cohabitation. If a child is born, you will worry about it being still-born or somehow deformed”—presumably a catalogue of young women’s fears.<sup>20</sup>

The ca. 1400 treatise *Von Ihesus pettlein* [On the Little Bed of Jesus] led its female-monastic readers through one of the more conservative descriptions of spiritual marriage. The bride describes her heart as “a pig’s sty, full of filth,” and is surprised that Jesus wants to be born there, echoing his birth in a manger. Jesus will create a chamber in that heart, and the bride will renovate it with a fresh coat of paint, featuring one wall with Jesus’s coat of arms, and another with erotica: Christ “lays himself down on [the soul’s] breast and there he kisses her.” Jesus has prepared a bridal bed for you, but one only wide enough for one person, so you will be sharing a tight and intimate space with him. At the Eucharist, the bride is reminded that Jesus “desires” her even more than she does him, and is advised to “imagine the Lord to yourself as he was naked before the cross, when he had disrobed for your sake, so that he might rest beside you naked and without anything between you.”<sup>21</sup>

The cases of individual women deviate significantly from this baseline. Camilla Battista da Varano was the daughter of Giulio Cesare da Varano (1434–1502), the Lord of Camerino, who bought a Poor Clares monastery for her there. Even as a teenager, Battista did Friday meditations on the Passion, with asceticism and attempts to squeeze out a single tear for Jesus. Beyond Franciscan sermons, Battista learned her mysticism through songs and through direct instruction by Jesus himself, for at age twenty-one she began having conversations with him.<sup>22</sup>

20 John Hus, *Letters*, trans. Matthew Spinka (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1972), 20–21.

21 “Von Ihesus pettlein,” in Jeffrey F. Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany* (New York: Zone, 1998), 395–98, 412, 419–24 (his translation).

22 Camilla Battista da Varano, *La vita spirituale*, in *Le opere spirituali*, ed. Giacomo Bocanera (Iesi: Scuola Tipografia Franciscana, 1958), 10–12. See Giuseppe Capriotti, “Visions, Mental Images, Real Pictures: The Mystical Experience and the Artistic Patronage of Sister Battista da Varano,” *Ikon* 6 (2013): 213–24, <https://doi.org/10.1484/J.IKON.5.102950>; William V. Hudon, “In The End, God Helped Me Defeat Myself: Autobiographical Writings by Camilla Battista da Varano,” *Religions* 9 (2018): n.p., <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel9030065>; Paul Lachance, “Battista da Varano (1458–1524): A Survey of Her Life and Writing as a Poor Clare Visionary,” *Mystics Quarterly* 20 (1994): 19–25.

Battista explained her general practice: "We need first to make the mental effort to evoke in our mind the places of the Passion, how it's the garden, the palace, Mount Calvary and so on, otherwise imagine them as the place you are in now." She thus trained to "conform" to Jesus by sensing him with her eyes and ears, those of her body and those of her mind, and maintaining mindfulness of him. Once Battista and another nun began singing as they were sewing and spinning. The song's lyrics treated Jesus's Passion, and systematically asked the hearer to observe each part of his body: "look at those hands... look at those feet... look at that hip..." The "vision" also had an auditory dimension, for Battista could hear the wailing of Mary Magdalene and John. The visual exercise and the harmony of sound triggered an ecstatic vision in which Battista's "soul then was enraptured." Her goal was to leave "the prison of my body to be with Christ."<sup>23</sup>

Battista's visions of Jesus were physical, occurring in her own spacetime. She appreciated Jesus's attractive beauty: "blonde abundant hair" that "looked so good over those large, well-proportioned shoulders; the white robes gave a glimpse of the body, which was a wonderful thing." The feelings were reciprocated: Jesus inscribed "ego te diligo Camillam" [I love you Camilla] on his own heart. She also specified the spatial relation between her soul and Jesus. Angels would haul her soul up to Jesus's feet, or she herself would bend down to those feet "like a new Mary Magdalene."<sup>24</sup>

Battista and Jesus had a human relationship, with human disagreement and exasperation. When Herod Antipas questioned Jesus during the Passion, Jesus remained silent (Lk 23:9). Battista, standing nearby, became frustrated by her husband's refusal to answer: "It seems that you yourself wish to die," she said, adding, "excuse me, my Blessed Lord, but I do not understand you." On another occasion, Battista felt a desire to see her husband's face. Jesus entered her soul, and before leaving offered to fulfill this desire: "If you want to see me," he told her, "look at me." She readily looked, but he had turned, so she saw him only from behind, "like a person, when parting from another turns his back and leaves." She described the partial sight, occurring under the constraints of spacetime: "When I saw him first he was over six steps away from me and was walking down a long hall. At the end of the hall there was a small door, like a room's door. I kept seeing him until he lowered his head to pass through the door; and then I couldn't see him, the door or even the hall any longer." Jesus's showing his back when she wanted to see his front was typical of their

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23 Camilla Battista da Varano, *Considerazioni sulla passione di Nostro Signore*, in *Le Opere*, 305–08, 332; Battista da Varano, *La vita*, 44, 55.

24 Battista da Varano, *La vita*, 7, 34, 39.

relationship. As Battista complained, “This Jesus always does the opposite of what I want!” Still, he could also be kind. As proof (“a clear sign”) that he had been in her soul, Jesus gave Battista three lilies, which symbolized aversion to the world, humility, and the desire to suffer.<sup>25</sup>

The situation of Margery Kempe was more complicated, as she was not a nun, but a married woman. The complications centred around her husband’s sex life. Sometimes she, though uninterested herself, acquiesced to his demands, and John “used her as he had done before” and “would not desist.” John’s frustration loaded a hypothetical question he asked Margery during a walk: “If there came a man with a sword who would strike off my head unless I made love with you as I used to do before, tell me on your conscience—for you say you will not lie—whether you would allow my head to be cut off, or else allow me to make love with you again, as I did at one time?” He asked that they sleep together “in one bed as we have done before,” that she pay off his debts, and that she eat with him on Fridays instead of fasting. The subsequent negotiations were fruitless: “No sir,” she refused, “I will never agree to break my Friday fast as long as I live.” “Well,” he retorted, “then I’m going to have sex with you again...” Eventually Jesus intervened, telling her that “I proceed like a husband who would wed a wife,” which means, he explained, that he had confidence in her and “they may go to bed together without any shame,” for even the greatest lord married to the poorest woman “must lie together.” Therefore she should “boldly, when you are in bed, take me to you as your wedded husband” and “boldly take me in the arms of your soul and kiss my mouth, my head, and my feet as sweetly as you want.”<sup>26</sup>

Public perception and human psychology played important roles here. Their married state required “familiarity,” and so Jesus declared that “I would not be ashamed of you, as many other people are” (presumably a reference to her other husband John) and thus could proudly “take you by the hand amongst the people and greet you warmly, so that they would certainly know [schuldyn wel knowyn] that I loved you dearly.” Margery wore a wedding ring engraved with “Jhesus est amor meus” [Jesus is my love]. Jesus also understood himself to have rescued Margery from her husband’s sexual demands: “You have your will in the matter of chastity as if you were a widow, although your husband is still living.” This, Jesus explained, was one of many reasons why she should love him. The situation became more complicated when Jesus urged Margery to marry the Godhead, as “I shall show you my secrets and my counsels, for

25 *Ibid.*, 10, 30–34, 38.

26 Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, trans. B. A. Windeatt (London: Penguin, 1985), 47, 58–60, 126–27, 254. See Rabia Gregory, “Marrying,” 111–19; Gregory, *Marrying*, 147–65.

you shall live with me without end." Margery's response to this new marriage proposal, or brokering, was to weep "amazingly much," as she understood it as incompatible with her current marriage to Jesus. Since "all her love and affection were fixed on the manhood of Christ," Margery "would not be parted from that for anything."<sup>27</sup>

This fascination with Jesus and his manhood heightened when she completed her pilgrimage to Rome. There she saw a woman breastfeeding her son, which caused her to weep, "as though she had seen our Lady and her son at the time of his Passion," to the confusion of the mother. This was part of a general pattern of behavior when she was in Rome. She would accost women carrying children in the street, to determine the sex of those children. On the discovery of a boy, she would "cry, roar and weep as if she had seen Christ in his childhood," and try to seize and kiss the child. Similarly, seeing an attractive man she would "weep and sob bitterly," as if seeing Jesus, for "she had so much feeling for the manhood of Christ."<sup>28</sup> Was this a deep-ken search for resemblances, or a plain-ken bridging by which she mentally entered the first century?

Like Margery, Dorothea of Montau was already married, and her second marriage to Jesus involved a mental and physical self-abnegation that paralleled the abuse she suffered at the hands of her first husband, Adalbert. At the age of seven, a number resonant in the deep ken, Dorothea experienced pain, like that of severe burns, over her body, followed by the pleasure of God's "comforting presence." This began a complex life-long relationship with pleasure and pain. Four years later she began self-harming, especially self-burning; at age ten, she burned her feet so badly that "she had to sit in a dunghill and cover the burn with dung to draw out the pain." She prepared herself for a dance by stabbing her feet, so that the rhythmic motion would pool blood in her shoes. Even as she grew up and married, she continued to beat herself with "rods, whips, thistles, thorny branches, and with hard, knotty, barbed scourges," and with "nettles, hard, coarse broom twigs and jagged nutshells, stinging herbs," mostly on her "shoulders, arms, hips, sides, loins, knees, calves and feet," so that "these individual wounds looked like one single big wound and her body resembled a plowed field."<sup>29</sup>

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27 Kempe, *Book of Margery Kempe*, 114, 122–26, 200. Equally fascinating is John's relationship with Jesus, who treats him better than Margery does. For example, when John, pantless, seriously injures himself by falling down the stairs, it is Jesus who urges Margery to take care of him. See Kempe, *Book of Margery Kempe*, 219–21.

28 *Ibid.*, 123, 131.

29 Johannes von Marienwerder, *The Life of Dorothea von Montau, a Fourteenth-century Recluse*, trans. Ute Stargardt (New York: Edwin Mellen, 1997), 44–49. See Albrecht Classen, "Wounding the Body and Freeing the Spirit: Dorothea von Montau's Bloody Quest for Christ, a Late-Medieval Phenomenon of the

Jesus's Passion authorized and recommended this violent asceticism. Dorothea was specifically motivated by a love of God, a desire to feel the Crucifixion, and a hope that "God would increase her suffering and its rewards." When she rested from her labour, Jesus "seemed to manifest himself to her by driving her with blows." One Easter, her wounds miraculously opened up and "bled so profusely as though they were being formed anew." Sometimes, Jesus would become even more directly involved: once, as she was falling asleep, Jesus himself began injuring her "on her shoulders, arms, chest and back; on her shoulder blades, sides, calves, and knees," faster than she could count, so that the wounds could serve as "symbols of their inseparable love"<sup>30</sup>—a plain-ken Jesus enabling a deep-ken understanding.

Dorothea's relationship with Jesus interfered with her relationship with Adalbert. Bliss distracted her from shopping; she had to cook without supplies, and in one instance she served her husband a bread purée with a side of bread. Her husband gave her an ultimatum: "If you don't cease your wandering about and see to the care of your household with greater effort than you have done so far, I shall tame you with shackles and chains." The threat was not rhetorical, and he locked her up for three days. He beat her for too slowly cooking fish, so severely that "her mouth was swelled shut hideously, which disfigured her greatly." She would respond with an affectionate smile, or with the "spiritual shield of patience," which her husband read as defiance and raged into further abuse.<sup>31</sup>

The timing is unclear, but it seems that Dorothea married Jesus while still married to Adalbert. She found herself caught between the demands of each. Sometimes, Jesus advised her to yield to her other husband: "Tear yourself away at once from my loving words and be obedient to your husband's commands!" Later, Jesus credited himself with rescuing her: "You may well love me dearly,

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Extraordinary Kind," in *Wounds and Wound Repair in Medieval Culture*, ed. Larissa Tracy and Kelly DeVries (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 417–47 (417), [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004306455\\_020](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004306455_020); Sieglinde Hartmann, "Bridal Mysticism and the Politics of the Anchorhold: Dorothy of Montau," in *Anchoritism in the Middle Ages*, ed. Catherine Innes-Parker and Naoe Kukita Yoshikawa (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013), 101–13; Michelle M. Sauer, "Violence, Isolation, and Anchoritic Preparation: Dorothy of Montau, anchoress of Marienwerder," *Magistra* 21 (2015): 132–50; Almut Suerbaum, "'O wie gar wundirbar ist dis wibes sterke!': Discourses of Sex, Gender, and Desire in Johannes Marienwerder's Life of Dorothea von Montau," *Oxford German Studies*, 39 (2010): 181–97, <https://doi.org/10.1179/007871910x12778178067968>; Max Töppen, ed., *Das Leben der heiligen Dorothea von Johannes Marienwerder*, *Scriptores rerum Prussicarum*, 2 (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1863).

30 Von Marienwerder, *Life of Dorothea*, 47–49, 53, 63.

31 *Ibid.*, 66, 95, 100–01.

for I dragged you away from your husband. When he was still alive and believed that he possessed you, I would drag you away and take possession of you.”<sup>32</sup>

Thus, Jesus became Dorothea’s “mighty lover” who “embraced and kissed her soul.” “As a bridegroom would treat his beloved bride,” Jesus cut up her food and fed her, while he “whispered sweetly.” In another instance, Jesus served himself to her as a banquet of “heavenly sweetness.” She “experienced severe longing and desire” for Jesus’s body, which she could consume as the consecrated host. She would get “spiritually drunk” with Jesus during mass, so drunk that she could not leave the chapel unassisted. During one mass, Jesus removed her heart, and “shoved into her” a new “extremely hot piece of flesh” that caused her joyous rapture. This intimacy eventually resulted in a “spiritual pregnancy during which the Lord gave birth to himself in her soul.” Her womb swelled, “as if it were ready to burst,” she experienced labour pains, and she could feel Jesus within her “kicking merrily.”<sup>33</sup>

When Adalbert died, Dorothea moved into the Marienwerder convent so that she could live with her remaining husband. Her confessor there recorded and publicized her story. In 1393, she had herself walled into an austere cell. Her intent was to subsist by eating only consecrated hosts, the body of her remaining husband that she had long lusted for, but Jesus insisted she accept one additional meal daily. She died the following year. We can give Jesus the last word here, to explain their relationship: “It was my will,” he told her, “that the foundation of your true, constant patience be tempted, tested and made manifest.” As a result, he praised her for demonstrating that “you loved poverty and misery for my sake and in accordance with my will were happy to be deprived of all transitory things all the days of your life.”<sup>34</sup>

The marital relationship between Katharina Tucher and Jesus was much less violent and less plain ken, but had a strangeness that suggests the deep ken. It also included a strained relationship with her mother-in-law, Mary. Katharina was well educated—she translated the Gospel of John into her own German dialect—and married, but she became a widow before 1420, when she was about thirty. Around 1433, she entered the cloister of St. Katharina’s at Nuremberg, perhaps not as a nun. In one instance, Jesus made her strip, and then criticized her “unclean” appearance, but agreed to make her beautiful by dressing her in luxurious garments. He “imprinted” her with his crown of thorns, but then also armed her with a spear. He comforted and cuddled with her. Ultimately, they

32 Ibid., 102–05. See *Das Leben der heiligen Dorothea von Johannes Marienwerder*, ed. Max Töppen (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1863), 249–51.

33 Von Marienwerder, *Life of Dorothea*, 77–79, 103, 163, 233, 238 (4.4). See Töppen, ed., *Das Leben*, 250.

34 Von Marienwerder, *Life of Dorothea*, 102, 123, 169. See Töppen, ed., *Das Leben*, 266.



resolved their conflict not through physical violence but through a game of dice with deep-ken significance. In the final round, she, or rather her soul, rolled a three, but he “defeated” her by rolling a five. He then explained that the three pips “are” the cross, and the five his wounds. Jesus seemed closer to his mother Mary than to his wife. Jesus ordered Katharina, as she was holding, and perhaps kissing, a crucifix, “You should not kiss me on my mouth. You are not worthy of it; my mother alone is.” When Jesus became upset by the possibility of Katharina taking a second, fully human husband, Mary intervened to scold her daughter-in-law: “As often as you think to take another husband, just that often have you done a great sin against me.”<sup>35</sup>

As a contrasting illustration, we might turn to a very different kind of relationship, that between Jesus and the fifteenth-century Ethiopian noblewoman Kristos Samra ክርስቶስ ሠጥራ, whose name means “Christ Delights in Her.” Her father-in-law, Iyäsus Moä ኢየሱስ ጭኦ [Christ has vanquished] was a priest to the Emperor of Ethiopia. At around age forty, in a fit or rage, she pushed a burning stick down the throat of a servant, killing her, and when sober promised to become a nun in exchange for the resurrection of her victim. Living around Lake Tana, Kristos Samra had visions of and spoke to Jesus. At times, her relationship was fairly intimate—as a reward she was once allowed to suck on his wounds—but more often it tended towards the formal. Her most important act was to request Jesus to forgive not only all humans, but also the devil. Astonished by the unprecedented ask, Jesus explained how difficult this would be. Finally, he had the archangel Michael escort her to hell, where she told the devil that Jesus had forgiven him (which was not obvious from the record of her earlier conversation). The devil was beyond ungrateful, and Michael had to shield her from his attacks. Kristos Samra and Michael escaped, rescuing thousands of souls in the process. On her deathbed, she dictated her life and visions to a scribe, which gives us this extraordinary window into Ethiopian history.<sup>36</sup>

35 Katharina Tucher, *Die “Offenbarungen” der Katharina Tucher*, ed. Ulla Williams and Werner Williams-Krapp (Tübingen: M. Niemeyer Verlag, 1998), 39–43, 65–67. See Gregory, *Marrying*, 148–63.

36 Wendy Laura Belcher, with Michael Kleiner, “The Life and Visions of Krēstos Šāmra, a Fifteenth-Century Ethiopian Woman Saint,” in *African Christian Biography*, ed. Dana Robert (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster, 2018), 80–101 (96, 99–101); Filäppos, *Atti di Krestos Samrā*, ed. Enrico Cerulli, *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* (Leuven: L. Durbecq, 1956), esp. 93–99.

## Doubts and Controversies

The strangeness of all these relationships may raise doubts about their plausibility, especially in the eyes of feminist historians today.<sup>37</sup> Such doubts arose even in the minds of contemporaries. The women's gender, at times, made them especially suspect (see Chapter 12). Jean Gerson (1363–1429) disliked female religious writing in general. Even if there were no other drawbacks, just “this so vast consumption of precious time would abundantly satisfy the devil.” He blamed their presumptuousness on an “insatiable appetite for seeing and speaking.”<sup>38</sup> In the case of a woman who claimed to see Jesus flying, Gerson recognized a *signum* [sign] not of a miracle, but that she was insane.<sup>39</sup> Following Gerson, Johannes Nider (1380–1438) emphasized the role of humility in the discernment of truth, a humility he found lacking in many women. He contrasted Francis, who “hid this treasure lest he lose it,” with more contemporary women claiming the stigmata, who proudly presumed to become second Francises.<sup>40</sup>

These mystics themselves recognized the problem, and sought solutions, in terms of proofs, or by explaining away the doubt. Dorothea herself admitted that her relationship “may seem scarcely or not believable” to a worldly perspective, because doubters “enjoy the life of the body.”<sup>41</sup> When Sister Lukardis died (1438), a whip and a hairshirt were discovered hidden in her straw mattress, and the blood on them demonstrated, in a contemporary historian's eyes, “her love,

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37 Ulrike Wiethaus, for instance, has accused medieval mystics of practicing a ritual that was “undeniably misogynist, anti-Judaic, militaristic, homophobic and xenophobic.” See Ulrike Wiethaus, “Thieves and Carnivals: Gender in German Dominican Literature of the Fourteenth Century,” in *The Vernacular Spirit: Essays on Medieval Religious Literature*, ed. Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, Duncan Robertson, and Nancy Bradley Warren (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 209–38 (211–12), [https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230107199\\_10](https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230107199_10). For a contrasting perspective, see Ute Stargardt, “Dorothy of Montau,” in *Medieval Holy Women in the Christian Tradition, c. 1100–1500*, ed. Alastair Minnis and Rosalynn Voaden (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 475–96. See Gábor Klaniczay, “Doubts in the Reality of Stigmata—Stigmata as a Weapon against Doubt,” in *Faith, Doubt, and Knowledge in Religious Thinking*, ed. Éva Pócs and Bea Vidacs (Budapest: Balassi Kiadó, 2020), 69–90; Carolyn Muessig, *The Stigmata in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2020); Gabriella Zarri, “Living Saints: A Typology of Female Sanctity in the Early Sixteenth Century,” in *Women and Religion in Medieval and Renaissance Italy*, ed. Daniel Bornstein and Roberto Rusconi, trans. Margery J. Schneider (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 219–303.

38 Jean Gerson, “De probabitione spirituum,” in OC, IX, 184.

39 Jean Gerson, “De distinctione revelationum,” in OC, III, 51.

40 John Nider, *Formicarius* (n.p.: n.d.), fol. 52vb.

41 Von Marienwerder, *Life of Dorothea*, 47.

seriousness, and devotion to God.”<sup>42</sup> Alijt Comhaer dreamed of a magnificent local wedding, which found confirmation in 1452 when plague killed eighteen nuns, a disaster the deep ken could connect with matrimonial glory.<sup>43</sup> Jesus personally reassured some of these women. In Venice, the Poor Clare nun Chiara Bugni (1471–1514) received small bottles of Jesus’s blood and his mother’s milk. The blood could serve as the object of a kind of indulgence. Chiara herself was dubious of both, until Jesus told her that the miracle had been effected not by “human ingenuity nor diabolical artifice, but only my providence.”<sup>44</sup>

The woman known as the Selige Schererin (d. 1409) had a series of revelations, and her supportive confessor encouraged her, even allowing her to wear a habit. Balancing spiritual and worldly duties was not easy. Because it was illicit to take Communion after sex, her confessor urged her to take Communion less; he felt the alternative, less sex, would force the husband into adultery. Because her frequent Communion scandalized the public, the confessor ended up putting her on a strict diet of three consecrated hosts per week. When this regime made her ill (“deadly sad and injured”), Jesus had to intervene. He would appear, and allow blood from his wounds to flow into her mouth to sustain her. That an apparition could have physical consequences reinforced the sense of its reality.<sup>45</sup>

The Dominican tertiary Lucy Brocadelli (1476–1544) received the stigmata in 1496 or 1497. Every year during Holy Week, she had celebrated each day by beating herself with an iron chain, to consonate with Jesus’s Passion; she also washed twelve poor peoples’ feet. She slept with a crucifix between her and her husband, an amateur actor who played Jesus in local plays. She explained that Catherine of Siena had asked Jesus that Lucy’s miraculous wounds serve as confirmation of Catherine’s own miraculous, and much disputed, wounds. Indeed, those who doubted Catherine’s wounds tended to also discount Lucy’s,

42 Meyer, *Women’s History*, 114.

43 Gregory, “Marrying,” 237–38.

44 Francesco Zorzi, *Vita [di una santa monaca]*, tradotta dal pre’Andrea Pillolini fiorentino, ed. Stefania Cavalli and Simone Rauch, in *La Vita e i Sermoni di Chiara Bugni*, ed. Reinhold Mueller and Gabriella Zarri (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2011), 165, 217. Zarri, “Living Saints,” 265 discusses its reliability.

45 “Von der seligen Schererin” (1409), reproduced in Hans-Jochen Schiewer, “Auditionen und Visionen einer Begine: Die ‘Selige Schererin’, Johannes Mulberg und der Basler Beginenstreit,” in *Die Vermittlung geistlicher Inhalte im deutschen Mittelalter*, ed. Timothy R. Jackson, Nigel F. Palmer und Almut Suerbaum (Tübingen: De Gruyter, 1996), 289–317 (306–17). See Hans-Jochen Schiewer, “Preaching and Pastoral Care of a Devout Woman (*deo devota*) in Fifteenth-century Basel,” in *Medieval Christianity in Practice*, ed. Miri Rubin (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2009), 126–31.

as dubious by association.<sup>46</sup> The cardinal Ippoliti d'Este (1479–1520) noted that Lucy's wounds bled every Friday, and their holy origins were confirmed when the collected blood failed to coagulate. Thus, he marvelled, Jesus "was transformed into a virgin."<sup>47</sup> Tito Veltri de Viterbo, Bishop of Castro (in Lazio), performed an empirical examination: after cleansing her hands with wine and vinegar, he enclosed one hand in a glove, securing it with his seal. Fifteen days later, in front of an audience of local dignitaries, he opened the glove, and a smell "so sweet and great" came from the wound that it filled the entire convent. This proved the wound was not man-, or woman-, made. Thus "God manifested the truth," and "all the people of Viterbo were well edified."<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, rumours ran that Lucy had been witnessed self-harming.<sup>49</sup> After about 1505, she began to cover her side wound out of humility, and Jesus complied with her request to render the hand and feet wounds invisible. Another stigmatic confirmed, in 1522, that Lucy's stigmata was "true and good" but had become invisible because of the "thankless" friars who doubted them.<sup>50</sup>

The stigmatic Osanna of Mantua (1449–1505) was a special case because her wounds were consistently invisible. Girolamo Scolari (1459–1535), the abbot of a nearby monastery, composed a life (1507) of her in which he claimed greater "certitude" about Osanna's stigmata than about Francis's, because the former he had "experiential familiarity" with, but could only take the latter on faith. That experiential knowledge was of a peculiar sort: Osanna "had truly perceptible pains of the Passion of Christ, and they were so enlarged it was as if they were visibly apparent." He appears to be describing a situation in which the stigmatic wounds themselves were invisible, but could be recognized by other signs: a swelling on the head and on the left side of the heart, and her inability to use her hands or, sometimes, to answer questions. He concluded that just as "he who

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46 Giacomo Marcianese, *Vita della B. Lucia di Narni dell'Ordine di S. Domenico* (Viterbo: Diotallevi, 1663), 43–46, 59. See Muessig, *Stigmata*, 213–16; Tamar Herzig, "Genuine and Fraudulent Stigmatics in Sixteenth-Century Europe," in *Dissimulation and Deceit in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Miriam Eliav-Feldon and Tamar Herzig (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 142–64 (145–50, 159), [https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137447494\\_10](https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137447494_10)

47 Heinrich Kramer, ed., *Stigmifere virginis Lucie de Narnia* (Olomouc: Konrad Baumgarten, 1501), fol. 4rv. The diabolical aspect only appears in an earlier version, quoted at Herzig "Genuine," 161.

48 Lucia Brocadelli, *Una mistica contestata: la vita di Lucia da Narni (1476–1544) tra agiografia e autobiografia: con l'edizione del testo*, ed. E. Ann Matter and Gabriella Zarri (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2011), 76–77.

49 Domenico Ponsi, *Vita della b. Lucia vergine di Narni* (Rome: Gonzaga, 1711), 149–60.

50 This is Stefana Quinzani (1457–1530), as quoted in Tamar Herzig, *Savonarola's Women: Visions and Reform in Renaissance Italy* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 167, 277.

sees bears witness, and his testimony is true, so I say ours is true and certain.”<sup>51</sup> It was precisely the invisibility of Osanna’s wounds that impressed the humanist Mario Equicola (d. 1525), who in 1518 praised belief as the “greatest light of the Catholic faith,” and its “certain credulity” that believed in things unseen.<sup>52</sup>

The most high-profile Jesus-bride debate involved María de Santo Domingo (1485–ca. 1524), the Beata of Piedrahíta. From a peasant background, she joined a Dominican tertiary order around age eighteen. She became involved, controversially, in the reform of the Dominicans and, no less controversially, experienced visionary trances that resulted in prophecy, which confirmed God’s approval of the reform. In these trances she “sometimes responds to important questions, even in theology, fundamental issues, as in things about Holy Scripture and things pertaining to our Holy Catholic faith.” Those who heard these responses marvelled that “a poor ignorant girl” from the countryside sometimes answered “better than some master of theology and man of great knowledge.”<sup>53</sup> Such special knowledge allowed her to advise, for example, Cardinal Francisco Jiménez de Cisneros (1436–1517) on when to launch his invasion of Africa. Annually, on Good Friday, her right side would open and bleed, where Jesus had been stabbed with the lance at his Crucifixion; this miracle proved “the truth that she always is near the Crucified Christ.”<sup>54</sup> María later became a prioress of a convent established for her at Aldeanueva. In 1507, she accepted a royal summons to Ferdinand’s court at Burgos, where she impressed Cisneros (see Chapter 11), but was soon investigated for faking holiness and lasciviousness, in, for example, her dancing. Four trials (1508–10)

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- 51 Girolamo Scolari, *Vita alia ex Italico de Osanna Andreasia*, in “De B. Osanna Andreasia” [18 June], in *Acta Sanctorum Iunii*, 68 vols., new edition (Paris and Rome: Victorem Palme, 1867), IV, 619.
  - 52 Mario Equicola, “In conservatione Divae Osanne Andreasiae Mantuanae Oratio ad D. Isabellam Estensem Mantuae Principem,” in *Osanna Andreasi da Mantova 1449–1505 tertii praedicatorum ordinis diva*, ed. Gabriella Zarri and Rosanna Golinelli Berto (Mantua: Casandreasi, 2006), 134.
  - 53 Defensa de Fr. Antonio de la Peña, in Bernardino Llorca, *La Inquisición española y los alumbrados (1509–1669)* (Salamanca: Universidad Pontificia, 1980), 262–63.
  - 54 María of Santo Domingo, *The Book of Prayer of Sor María of Santo Domingo*, trans. Mary E. Giles (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1990), 123 (prologue). See Vincente Beltrán de Heredia, *Las corrientes de espiritualidad entre las Dominicas de Castilla durante la primera mitad del siglo XVI* (Salamanca: Convento de San Esteban, 1941), 9–17; Geraldine McKendrick and Angus MacKay, “Visionaries and Affective Spirituality during the First Half of the Sixteenth Century,” in *The Impact of the Inquisition in Spain and the New World*, ed. Mary Elizabeth Perry and Anne J. Cruz (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991), 93–101; Jodi Bilinkoff, “A Spanish Prophetess and Her Patrons: The Case of Maria de Santo Domingo,” *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 23 (1992): 21–34; Herzig, “Genuine,” 151–12.

ultimately ruled in her favour, in part thanks to the support of Ferdinand and Cisneros.<sup>55</sup>

Although others never saw Jesus, María frequently spoke to him, as if her husband were physically present. Sometimes her holy mother-in-law would also appear, only to her. This caused her some plain-ken spacetime problems negotiating narrow doorways that allowed only single-file passage: who had precedence, Jesus's mother or his wife? The two argued in no-you-go-first conversations, with only the Beata's side audible to onlookers: "I could not be Christ's bride, unless you Mary had given birth to him for me. Hence it is proper [*decet*] for you to go first." The gossipy royal historian Pietro Martire d'Anghiera (1457–1526) made explicit his doubt and disgust for her and her elite followers: "The entire court is stupefied by these and similar conversations—I nearly said 'stupidities.'" He reported that "some say she's deceived by a demon, others argue she's visited by angels and Christ, and from this discord they rouse mockery from the people."<sup>56</sup> The contemporary editor of her work admitted that either her life was the "most perfect and holy that we know in the world," or the "worst and most imperfect"; he believed the former, but could imagine no middle ground.<sup>57</sup> The Dominican reformer Juan Hurtado de Mendoza (d. 1525) found himself precisely in that middle ground. He doubted that all her raptures were authentic and recognized that María's claims to dance with Jesus were ridiculous, but watching their half-visible duets had a profound emotional effect on him.<sup>58</sup>

## Modern Devotion

Geert Groote (1340–84) was born in Deventer, in the Netherlands, and then studied at Paris, where he learned nominalism (see Appendix B) under a student of William of Ockham (1285–1347). Although he was a prominent theology teacher, a brush with a near-fatal disease gave him a sense of urgency. He retired to Deventer, converted his family home into a shelter for single and

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55 Vicente Beltrán de Heredia, *Historia de la Provincia de España (1450–1550)* (Rome: Istituto Storico Domenicano, 1939), 82–110; Jodi Bilinkoff, "A Spanish Prophetess and Her Patrons: The Case of Maria de Santo Domingo," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 23 (1992): 21–34; Jesús G. Lunas Almeida, *Historia del señorío de Valdecorneja en la parte referente a Piedrahita* (Avila: S. Martín, 1930), 151–83.

56 Peter Martyr d'Anghiera, *Opus Epistolarum* (Amsterdam: Elzevirianis, 1670), 261–62.

57 María of Santo Domingo, *The Book of Prayer*, 129.

58 Jesús G. Lunas Almeida, *Historia del señorío de Valdecorneja en la parte referente a Piedrahita* (Avila: S. Martín, 1930), 168–69. See María de Santo Domingo, *The Book of Prayer*, 25, 31.

widowed women, and travelled across the Netherlands preaching to large crowds. His criticism of clergy and laity alike triggered accusations of heresy, but he explained that he had done nothing more than speak about Jesus, especially that Jesus who, “robed in the cloak of holy poverty,” “came upon this earth as a Virgin’s Son, and in exceeding poverty.”<sup>59</sup> Under pressure, the Bishop of Utrecht agreed to silence him by banning lay preaching. In 1384, Groote died of a disease contracted while ministering to the sick.

Followers came together around Groote to form the Brethren and Sisters of the Common Life. The movement spread by launching colony communities and soon stretched across the Dutch and German-speaking lands in hundreds of establishments, including both clergy and lay people. Most Devout were women, and many of them were truly devout, as opposed to being forced by circumstances to join. Some, few, tried to confine their movement to within the community, as a way to join Christ in his suffering, for example at Bethlehem near Louvain in 1414.<sup>60</sup>

The Devout lived intentional lives in regulated communities. They pursued spiritual perfection with the methodical attention of an athlete in training. With a special enthusiasm for books, the Devout composed mystical manuals of systematic prayer and mental imagery, with exercises set out daily. Groote proposed imagination as a tool for devotion: one could envision suffering together with Jesus. Inspired by impending Judgment and an awareness of heaven and hell, they focused on the imitation of Jesus and meditation on his Passion, with special devotion to the Eucharist. They taught, prayed, copied manuscripts, studied scripture, and performed acts of charity. Persistent labour was seen as a form of devotion, and they worked while singing or reciting scripture.<sup>61</sup> The Devout sought to place their deep-ken lives over their plain-ken lives; their actions’ meanings mattered more than their outcomes. Mother Ide at Emmerich spent her days alternating between spinning and finding solace in a book on the life of Jesus she kept nearby. Sister Griete (1413–22) dedicated her life as a *trouwelschat* [betrothal-gift] to Jesus. She encouraged the other women to remember and share helpful gems from their readings. When she caught herself

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59 Thomas à Kempis, *The Founders of the New Devotion*, trans. J. P. Arthur (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, and Trübner, 1905), 16, 24, 29.

60 Koen Goudriaan, “Empowerment through Reading, Writing, and Example: The *Devotio moderna*,” in *Christianity in Western Europe, c.1100–c.1500*, ed. Miri Rubin and Walter Simons, *Cambridge History of Christianity* 4 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2010), 405–19 (409–10), <https://doi.org/10.1017/chol9780521811064.028>; John Van Engen, *Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life: The Devotio Moderna and the World of the Later Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 56, 121, 137, 158–60.

61 Goudriaan, “Empowerment,” 412–13; Van Engen, *Sisters and Brothers*, 140.

taking excessive pleasure in her bookmark, she made a point to confess it. Sisters woke at four in the morning, in time for chapel prayers, before beginning their work, which was punctuated by prayers, meals, and the mass, and retired at six or seven for two or three hours' reading and review before sleep.<sup>62</sup> Despite the presence of a priest, Sister Eefce Neghels (d. 1423) insisted, against modesty, on taking off her shirt on her deathbed, for Jesus was "a naked bridegroom who would have a naked bride."<sup>63</sup>

The Devout worked within orthodoxy, but pushed at its borders, especially against its rules restricting unregulated communities. This was a new movement, in an age when novelty was suspicious; new establishments often had to stipulate to local authorities that they were not actually "new religious orders" per se. In particular, the Devout were criticized for being ordered without being a religious order. They argued that the key characteristics of a religious order were vows, habits, and superiors—none of which they had. As a result, the Devout emphasized that they were voluntarily imposing order on themselves. Groote himself "made resolutions," not vows. In answer to the critics of these irregular regulars, six Brethren did take monastic vows in 1387, and established a Congregation at Windesheim, south of Zwolle. The Devout who remained lay had to explain that many lay people, and all good people, led well ordered lives, just as bells end work shifts for artisans. The hostility reached the point where parish priests threatened to refuse Devout participation in the Eucharist. In 1401, the Bishop of Utrecht authorized their way of life, but it remained controversial. A Dominican named Grabon attacked them on this point at the Council of Constance (1418). A special committee, including Pierre d'Ailly (1351–1420) and Gerson, rejected the criticism by citing history: in the first-century, Jerusalem Christians lived in community, before the establishment of monasticism.<sup>64</sup>

Criticized for being eccentric, the Devout replied that their eccentricity was not nudity or skipping church (which, they agreed, should be criticized) but was merely living lives more closely modelled on Jesus's "precepts."<sup>65</sup> Though

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62 Van Engen, *Sisters and Brothers*, 135–36.

63 Dirk De Man, ed., *Hier beginnen sommige stichtige punten van onsen oelden zusteren* (The Hague: Martinus Hijhoff, 1919), 57. This is a trope in the devotional literature. See Johannes Busch, *Chronicon Windeshemense und Liber de reformatione monasteriorum*, ed. Karl Grube (Halle: Hendel, 1886), 101–02, 276.

64 This last point is Gerson's. Hermann von der Hardt, ed., *Magnum oecumenicum Constantiense Concilium de universali Ecclesiae reformatione, unione, et fide*, 6 vols. (Frankfurt: Christianus Genshius, 1698), III, col. 116. See Goudriaan, "Empowerment," 408–12; Van Engen, *Sisters and Brothers*, 87–88, 100, 171, 179–82.

65 Albert Hyma, "Het traktaat 'Super modo vivendi devotorum hominum simul commorantium,' door Gerard Zerbolt van Zutphen," *Archief voor de geschiedenis van het Aartsbisdom Utrecht* 52 (1926): 56–71 (40–41).



controversial, collective living, the Devout said, was inspired by and authorized by “the example of Christ, whose action is our instruction.”<sup>66</sup> Groote defended collective living even without formal authorization by quoting Jesus saying that where “two or three gathered in my name there I am in the middle of you” (Mt 18:20).<sup>67</sup> Approximating apostolic poverty, the Devout redirected all income above a certain threshold to the library and the poor, discouraging private, locked chests and replacing “my” with “our.”<sup>68</sup> One critic, annoyed by the Devout’s modest dress, agreed that “every action of Jesus is an instruction for us,” but pointed out that Jesus himself wore expensive clothing, as was evident from the soldiers gambling for it (Mt 27:35).<sup>69</sup> The Devout consciously and carefully stayed on the good side of the Church hierarchy; they avoided academics, controversy, new scholarship, and social reform. In contrast to the brides of Jesus described above, the Devout soon shied away from claims of direct mystical experience of God.<sup>70</sup>

### Jesus-breath in Muslim Verse

The long Islamic tradition of Jesus poetry intensified in the thirteenth century, especially on the lips of the Sufis, who had a specific fascination with Jesus, breath, and Jesus-breath.<sup>71</sup> The term “sufi” referred to the mystics’ ascetic tradition of wearing wool (*suf*), a practice specially associated with Jesus, as explained for example in the thirteenth-century book of Sufi etiquette by Najm al-Din Razi (1177–1256).<sup>72</sup> Defying any plain-ken sense of a historical sequence of prophets, the poet Fakhr al-Din ‘Iraqi (1213–1289) noted that a “pinch of

66 Paul Frédéricq, *Corpus documentorum inquisitionis haereticæ pravitatis neerlandicæ*, 5 vols. (Ghent: Vuylsteke, 1896), II, 160.

67 Gerrit de Groot, “Verlorener Traktat ‘de Simona ad beguttas,’” in *Quellen und Forschungen zur Geschichte der deutschen Mystik*, ed. Rudolf Langenberg (Bonn: Hanstein, 1902), 1–33 (30).

68 Van Engen, *Sisters and Brothers*, 174.

69 Thomas Kock, “Zerbolt incognito: Auf den Spuren des Traktats ‘De vestibus pretiosis,’” in *Kirchenreform von unten: Gerhard Zerbolt von Zutphen und die Brüder vom gemeinsamen Leben*, ed. Nikolaus Staubach (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2004), 165–235 (201).

70 Gregory, “Marrying,” 8, 233; Gregory, *Marrying*.

71 The greatest of the medieval Jesus poets was the blind, vegan freethinker Al-Ma’arri (973–1057). See Reynold Alleyne Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Poetry* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1921), 135, 171, 173, 178.

72 Fritz Meier, “The Rules for Novices (*Ādāb al-murīdīā*),” in “A Book of Etiquette for Sufis,” in *Essays on Islamic Piety and Mysticism*, trans. John O’Kane (Brill: Leiden, 1999), 49–92.

his [Muhammad's] noble being was placed in Jesus's breath."<sup>73</sup> Similarly Ibn Arabi (1165–1240) understood Jesus as the seal of holiness because he was a pure spirit whom Gabriel had "blown" into Mary.<sup>74</sup> Rumi (1207–73), the most famous Sufi poet, wrote verse specifically about Jesus-breath. Sometimes, those references reached across subcult divisions: Christians attended Rumi's funeral, reading from the Gospels, despite Muslims' attempts to beat them back, for they believed that Rumi was "the Jesus of our time," and in him they "understood the true nature of Jesus."<sup>75</sup>

In our period, the most famous evocation of Jesus-breath came from Hafiz of Shiraz. Ibn Battuta (1304–69) reported that city as the place where the Qur'an was chanted most beautifully, and there women gathered in the largest numbers—a single group might number in the thousands—to hear preachers in the mosques. The name Hafiz referred to someone who had memorized the Qur'an, and, according to his own poetry, he would recite the revelation at night as a form of devotion. The earliest known copy of Hafiz's *Divan*, now in Tashkent, was dated 1400–01. Already in the early fifteenth century, over five hundred manuscripts of the *Divan* were collected and collated into a critical edition. Enjoying an immediate and wide celebrity, Hafiz's *Divan* described the quest for union with the Beloved (who is perfect-complete, *kamal*) or Friend, who in a spiritual sense represents God and the Divine. The longing for what can never be achieved causes suffering, that can, for example, turn his heart into a kebab (362/291).<sup>76</sup>

Hafiz's interest in Jesus clusters around that prophet's breath. His references to Jesus are usually about breath, and his references to breath are usually about Jesus. This should not surprise: even beyond Jesus, Hafiz makes frequent use of the movement of air. Three kinds recur: natural breeze (*nasim*), human breath

73 Annemarie Schimmel, *And Muhammad Is His Messenger: The Veneration of the Prophet in Islamic Piety* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 63.

74 Ibn al-'Arabī, *Ibn al-'Arabī's Fuṣūṣ Al Hikam: An Annotated Translation of "The Bezels of Wisdom"*, trans. Binyamin Abrahamov (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), 104–13, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315736655>. See Ibn al-'Arabī, *The Meccan Revelations*, trans. Michel Chodkiewicz (New York: Pir, 2002), 220, 307, 334–35.

75 Shams al-Dīn Aḥmad Aflākī, *Les saints des derviches tourneurs*, ed. and trans C. Huart (Paris: Leroux 1922), 96–97.

76 Charles-Henri de Fouchécour, "Ḥāfiẓ and the Sufi," in *Hafiz and the Religion of Love in Classical Persian Poetry*, ed. Leonard Lewisohn (London: I. B. Tauris, 2015), 143–57 (148); Leonard Lewisohn, "Prolegomenon to the Study of Ḥāfiẓ," in *Hafiz and the Religion of Love*, ed. Lewisohn, 3–30 (3–4, 11, 13). References to Hafiz are in the format (x/y), where x is page number and y is *ghazal* number, in Hafiz, *The Collected Lyrics of Ḥāfiẓ of Shirāz*, trans. Peter Avery (Cambridge, UK: Archetype, 2007).

(*nafas*), and divine wind (*bad*).<sup>77</sup> These need not be mere metaphor: breath was a powerful component of popular magic in fourteen-century Persia, and Hafiz describes (67/36) blowing on knots as breathing spells.

Breath is most especially associated with healing in the form of Jesus-breath, or Messiah-breath. This is not Hafiz's invention, for Rumi also makes many references to it as well.<sup>78</sup> Jesus-breath, like the breeze, can carry a fragrance and news (300/235). It has great health benefits: Jesus-breath can heal a heart because its breather can take up sorrow (517/428, 126/86), and even resurrect us (241/181), because one with Jesus-breath understands the pain of love (558/462). This association with healing brings with it an association with death, since suffering so intertwined with desire for the Beloved. The Beloved can thus use the normally healing Jesus-breath to kill, in order to allow life (755/477).

The shadow of your cypress, O Jesus-breathed /  
is the reflection of the soul fallen on putrid bones (70/38)

To whom can this subtlety be told, that the stony-hearted one  
Slew us, yet the breath of Jesus son of Mariam is with him (96/59)

This suffering even has value in that it creates a problem for Jesus-breath to solve: "The physician for love is Messiah-breathed and kind, but / If no pain in you he sees, for whom is he going to prescribe?" (242/182).

Hafiz strongly associates Jesus-breath with wine and intoxication. In Sufi poetry, wine can serve as a metaphor for prayer, and intoxication a metaphor for being in love—although neither was solely metaphorical. The initial lines of the first and second couplets of one poem are parallel:

The morning breeze with felicitations for the wine-selling Elder  
has come [...]  
The air has turned into the breath of the Messiah...

And the last line explains this connection: "Maybe he [Hafiz] has come to his sense from the intoxication of pseudo-asceticism" (229/171).

Similarly, another poem, which has the line "Kiss the wine-boy's curving chin to the melody of reed and lute," later reveals that the wine-boy himself has Jesus-breath:

<sup>77</sup> Note the first two words have Arabic origins, and the third Persian.

<sup>78</sup> For a discussion of this with examples see John Renard, *All the King's Falcons: Rumi on Prophets and Revelation* (Lahore: Suhayl Academy, 2001), 91; Oddbjørn Leirvik, *Images of Jesus Christ in Islam*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Continuum, 2010), 93, <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781472548528>. Rumi's Jesus-breath has a wider range of associations than Hafiz's.

From the hand of a fair-cheeked darling possessed of Jesus's breath  
 Drink wine and dismiss the story of 'Ad and Thamud (258/198)

The last two proper names refer to people in the Qur'an who were punished for refusing to obey God's messengers. Hafiz thus warns his reader not to be keen on asceticism, and not to worry about punishment.

Hafiz is not really—or not only—drunk. This is an expression of the opposition to the reason, religion, and decorum of the hypocrites and false ascetics, in opposition to the barriers erected by organized religion. Note this is partially a parallel with the hesychasts (see Chapter 12). Being the opposite of love,<sup>79</sup> reason is even worse than asceticism and decorum. It is feral (149/105). Hafiz advises someone, presumably the wine-boy, "do not frighten us with reason's prohibitions but bring the wine" (113/73). The breeze carrying the Beloved's scent scatters reason (248/188), and a curl of the Beloved's hair can bind it (479/394).

The wineboy with Jesus-breath can bring us the wine and the healing breath necessary to relieve suffering. Although beautiful, the wineboy is not the Beloved—none of this is the Beloved—but wine and Jesus-breath are the best Hafiz can do. At the end, even though the Beloved denies Hafiz, he can still think about Jesus and his breath:

Let there be the memory that, while your rebuke was slaying me,  
 On your sugar-crunching lip was the miracle of Jesus (262/200)

Thus, the Jesus-breath of the Jesus-breeze enlivens Hafiz's soul...

O Jesus-breeze, may your times always be happy  
 for by your breath Hafiz's wounded soul has come alive (130/89)

... and in return Hafiz's poems set Jesus in joyous motion:

There's no wonder if, at the words of Hafiz, in the heavens  
 Venus's ecstasy makes the Messiah dance! (24/4)

Some scholars link this image of the Messiah dancing as a reference to relatively lively Christian music, but there is a marked absence of association in Hafiz of the Messiah or Jesus with Christians. I think, rather, this is mostly an expression of joy, perhaps compounded in that Hafiz makes dignified things dance—Timurid princes (520/431), and the cypress trees (215/159) which were thought

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<sup>79</sup> Hafiz usually used *'ishq* for love, which had a specifically erotic sense, and did not appear in the Qur'an. Ali Asghar Seyed-Gohrab, "The Erotic Spirit: Love, Man and Satan in Ḥāfiz's Poetry," in *Hafiz and the Religion of Love*, ed. Lewisohn, 107–22 (108).

to have perfect proportion and beauty—so it makes sense that an ascetic like Jesus would be made to dance, like a *true* ascetic.

Jesus was a fashionable image in love poetry well beyond Hafiz. The Ottoman Grand Vizier Mahmud Pasha Angelović (d. 1474) had been born a Christian before being involuntarily recruited into the bureaucracy, and then converted to Islam and married a daughter of Sultan Mehmed II (1432–81). His mystical-erotic poetry compares Mary's arms coiling around Baby Jesus to "your curl" of hair coiling around "your ruby lip."<sup>80</sup> Mehmed was a particular enthusiast for the work of one of his court poets, Isa Necati (d. 1509). Perhaps reflecting his Jesus name ("Isa") suggestive of Christian origins, Necati matches the Christian cross with a lover's hair.<sup>81</sup> In another love poem, he writes, "When the people of the heart see your image in the mirror / They thought that it was Mary; who pressed Jesus on her breast."<sup>82</sup> Even Mehmed himself composed his own Jesus-related poetry. As Avni, his penname, he has fallen in love with the lord of Galata, Istanbul's Genoese merchant colony, who "follows the way of Jesus." Although "his glances kill," this Christian lord's "lips give life anew."<sup>83</sup> The Jesus-breath is not explicit here, but those lips may exhale it and its traditional life-giving property.

Two themes resound in Jesus poetry in Hafiz, in Mehmed's court, and beyond. The first was the healing abilities of Jesus and his breath. Isa Necati described the "sugar-lipped" Jesus who "cured an ailing me a thousand times with a word,"<sup>84</sup> a word spoken with breath. The Persian Sufi poet Jami (1414–92), born near the famous Jam Minaret, continues the image: Muhammad's "lip taught Christ how to quicken the dead," and Christ can heal the "defect" of someone shamefully having a white body and a black heart.<sup>85</sup>

80 Theoharis Stavrides, *The Sultan of Vezirs: The Life and Times of the Ottoman Grand Vizir Mahmud Pasha Angelović (1453–1474)* (Brill: Leiden, 2001), 318, <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004492332>; Theoharis Stavrides, "From Byzantine Aristocracy to Ottoman Ruling Elite: Mahmud Pasha Angelović and His Christian Circle, 1458–1474," in *Living in the Ottoman Realm*, ed. Christine Isom-Verhaaren and Kent F. Schul (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 2016), 55–65.

81 Matthias Kappler, "The Beloved and his Otherness: Reflections on 'Ethnic' and Religious Stereotypes in Ottoman Love Poetry," in *Intercultural Aspects in and around Turkic Literatures*, ed. Matthias Kappler (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006), 37–48 (42–43).

82 Stavrides, *Sultan*, 318.

83 Walter G. Andrews and Mehmet Kalpaklı, *The Age of Beloveds: Love and the Beloved in Early-Modern Ottoman and European Culture and Society* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2006), 3–4.

84 Walter G. Andrews, *Poetry's Voice, Society's Song: Ottoman Lyric Poetry* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1985), 75–76.

85 Schimmel, *And Muhammad Is His Messenger*, 133; William N. Wysham, "Jesus in the Poetry of Iran," *The Muslim World* 42 (1952): 104–11 (108–09).

Christians shared Muslims' interest in associations between Jesus and breathing, as we see with the hesychasts. In Christianity, Jesus and the Holy Spirit were both God. "Spirit" was the English translation of the Latin Bible's *spiritus*, itself going back to the Greek word πνεῦμα *pneuma*, which sometimes meant "wind" in a general sense. There was also, in some subcults, a connection between the Jesus canon and the breath: Pachomius the Great (ca. 292–34) had described scriptures as the "breath of God."<sup>86</sup> The usual word for Bible in Armenian is Աստվածաշունչ *Astvašownč*, literally the breath, respiration, or soul of God.<sup>87</sup> Bernardino of Siena invited his hearers to examine the letter h, which looks "like a pregnant woman," and thus refers to the Holy Spirit, by which Mary was impregnated. He notes that h is not voiced, rather almost breathed from the throat, and thus the Holy Spirit comes with the wind, with the breath.<sup>88</sup>

Muslim Jesus poetry's second theme is the liberating potential of asceticism. Isa Necati envisioned that as worldly goods bind one to the earth, so in contrast the ascetic Messiah had ascended in the sky. A number of Persian Sufi poets similarly focused on the power of Jesus's renunciation. Qasim-i Anvar (1356–1433) lamented that the fleshbound could not "distinguish the soul's Jesus-breath / from this corporeal frame." Verse from a century earlier was still influential on fifteenth-century poets: in the *Gulshan-i Raz* [Rosegarden of Secrets], Mahmoud Shabestari (1288–1340) recalls Jesus's announcement that "I go to my Father above" before ascending into heaven. Shabestari urges his readers to "set forth for your Father!" and "leave the world's carcass to vultures" if "you wish to be a bird in flight."<sup>89</sup>

In our terms, through his achievement, Jesus thus transcended the plain-ken world of contradictions and multiplicity to attain the deep-ken perfection of the divine oneness. Shabestari's lines prompted an extended commentary from Shaikh Asiri Lahiji (1506–60), who considered Jesus the prophet most like Muhammad. Like other humans, Jesus was a "theophany" of the name "Allah," which was the "blower into," the "in-spirer" of Jesus. In his asceticism, Jesus

86 Pachomius, *Instructions, Letters, and Other Writings of Saint Pachomius and his Disciples*, trans. Armand Veilleux, Pachomian Koinonia 3 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian, 1982), 97.

87 Vreg Nersessian, "Armenian Christianity," in *The Blackwell Companion to Eastern Christianity*, ed. Ken Parry (Chichester: Blackwell, 2007), 23–46 (27), <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470690208.ch2>; Vreg Nersessian, *The Bible in the Armenian Tradition* (Los Angeles, CA: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2001), 90.

88 Bernardino of Siena, *Le prediche volgari: La predicazione del 1425 in Siena*, ed. Ciro Cannarozzi, 2 vols. (Florence: Rinaldi, 1958), II, 191–95.

89 Walter G. Andrews, Najaat Black, and Mehmet Kalpaklı, *Ottoman Lyric Poetry* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1997), 75–76; Javad Nurbakhsh, *Jesus in the Eyes of the Sufis* (London: Khaniqahi-Nimatullahi, 1983), 56.

“manifests” “pure freedom” and “dispassion, detachment and emancipation” from the “bondage of multiplicity and habit.” Lahiji shows his reader how to emulate Jesus: “If only you could emancipate yourself of this human soul and its passions, by means of ascetic self-denial and self-effacement, then you would unquestionably attain, like Christ [...] the level of the Oneness of the Divine Essence” which was “unblemished and consecrated from all contrariness and disparity.”<sup>90</sup>

An enduring tradition in Sufi poetic logic is the distinction, and sometimes identification, between *fana* [annihilation] and *baqin* [enduring]. Through the practice of *dhikr*, the mystic annihilates the passions—and, for Lahiji, the worldly multiplicity—to achieve an eternal enduring in what does not change. Some of these early mystics spoke in terms that, with the deep ken, defied the plain-ken restrictions of spacetime: Dhul-Nun al-Misri (796–860) described a mystic who “is as he was, when he was before he was,” while Abu’l-Hasan Kharāqani (963–1033) equated his own volume with that of the earth and heavens, and equated the length of his stride to the distance between earth and heaven. Abu’l-Qasim al-Junayd (830–910) explicitly defined *tawhid* [unification] as “the separation of the Eternal from that which was originated in time.” That distinction between creation and creator appears even in Turkish verse, even at the very end of our period: in his Şehrengiz of Istanbul (1520s), the janissary poet Yahya bey Dukagjini (1488–1582) praises poetry for its ability to reveal divine knowledge. It reflects all of creation, which, in turn, shows the unity of God. Jesus—alongside Noah and Moses, as well as other prophets—“desire[s] for the beauty of the beloved / all are longing for the beloved.” Thus “constantly / the power of God will unfold” all creation “like daylight.”<sup>91</sup>

Throughout this book we have seen Jesus cultists sometimes looking with deep-ken eyes, and sometimes with plain-ken eyes. In these mystics, poets, and hesychasts we find cultists who, from their mystical heights, have a panoramic view in which both types of perspective are visible. Indeed, ‘Ali Hujwiri (ca. 1009–71) presented *fana* and *baqin* as two kinds of awareness.<sup>92</sup> Our poets can

90 G. Böwering, “Baqa’ wa Fanā’,” *Encyclopaedia Iranica* 3 (1988): 722–24; Michael Glünz, “Poetic Tradition and Social Change: The Persian Qasida in Post-Mongol Iran,” in *Qasida Poetry in Islamic Asia & Africa*, ed. Stefan Sperl and Christopher Shackle (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 183–203 (200–02); Nurbakhsh, *Jesus*, 19–24; Andrew Wilcox, “The Dual Mystical Concepts of *Fanā’* and *Baqā’* in Early Sūfism,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 38 (2011): 95–118, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13530191003794681>

91 Böwering, “Baqa’ wa Fanā’,” 722–24; B. Deniz Çalış-Kural, *Şehrengiz, Urban Rituals and Deviant Sufi Mysticism in Ottoman Istanbul* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 123 (a typographical error misidentifies Moses as David, also a prophet in Islam); Wilcox, “Dual Mystical Concepts,” 99, 104.

92 Wilcox, “Dual Mystical Concepts,” 99.

look with the plain ken at creation, at the peach fuzz on wine-boys, and catch glimpses of what the world would look like seen through the deep ken. Our hesychasts can look with human eyes at an uncreated light. Both groups seek and sometimes achieve access to a deep ken in which everything consonates with everything, and thus consonates all the more powerfully with, and even identifies with, God. Their frustration with the limitations of this vision, like binoculars that constantly drift out of focus, gives voice to this poetry, and through practice they seek to make the deep ken the default way of seeing the world.

Breath and healing fell out of fashion in Jesus-related poetry after Yahya bey Dukagjini, but returned with a vengeance in the eighteenth century; the search for the Beloved continued unabated.

## Envoi

The forms of devotion described in this chapter are perhaps more alien to our sensibilities today than anything else in this book. Some of these Jesus-intimates' contemporaries shared our discomfort. The first husbands of the women who remarried Jesus had difficult relationships to navigate, and some behaved monstrously in their frustrations. Some theologians dismissed mystics' experiences as pride or madness. Juan Hurtado de Mendoza drove himself mad over what he saw as María de Santo Domingo's cloying fraud. Critics hounded the Modern Devout for preferring Jesus-intimacy over tradition, and the Sufis' esotericism and indecorous imagery incited centuries of persecution.

Sometimes, priests threw plain-ken cold water on deep-ken passions. One German account, in a humorous (and, therefore, suspect) collection, involves a sermon on Jesus's Passion that moved the priest's audience to weep. He tenderly comforted them: "Don't cry, dear children! It is now some fifteen hundred years since this is said to have happened; it could be made up; it's so far from Jerusalem to here." This may have been satire, but such things did happen: another priest advised an overly emotional Margery Kempe (so overwhelmed by thoughts of the Passion that she was "compelled to cry out very loudly and weep very bitterly, as though she would have died"): "Woman, Jesus is long since dead."<sup>93</sup>

Many of this chapter's Jesus cultists would have been too busy experiencing ecstasy to worry about such doubts and distance. They walked their mystic ways across realities and across centuries. In her womb, Dorothea felt Jesus kicking; in his verse, Hafiz set the Messiah dancing.

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93 Kempe, *Book of Margery Kempe*, 186–87; Johannes Pauli, *Von Schimpf und Ernst* (Strasbourg: Gruninger, 1522), fol. 87v (no. 459).





## 21. Ethics, Pacifism, Vegetarianism

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What profits it that other men be peaced with thee when battles  
of vices be in thy soul?

—Wycliffite Gospel commentary<sup>1</sup>

On 27 May 1988, the sportscaster Cookie “Chainsaw” Randolph announced that Larry Bird had two sprained ankles, “which is the maximum number of ankles you may sprain in the National Basketball Association.” In fact, the National Basketball Association (NBA) rulebook does not mention ankles at all. Here the humour comes from the slippage between rules created by the NBA and the uncreated and unchanging “rules” inherent in human physiology.

Fifteenth-century thinkers had similar questions, many revolving around ethics. Who makes the rules? Do ethical rules change over time? How can humans learn them? Each ken has distinct answers to these questions. The deep ken searches for an eternal set of rules that must be deduced, whether from nature, human bodies, or facets of Jesus’s life beyond his explicit teachings. Today, people might say that humans are “not designed” for running, for eating meat, or for having three broken ankles. In contrast, the plain ken constricts ethics to human history. Rules are made in time, and are delivered to us in time, explicitly as rules, whether by an ethics professor, a sports organization, or Jesus in a sermon from the Gospels. Each culture might have its own moral norms; the NBA updates its rulebook each year.

The dominant approach to ethics in the fifteenth-century Jesus cult was oriented towards the deep ken. This chapter begins with an overview of what such ethics looked like, and then zooms in on two particular themes, investigating the deep-ken approach to issues of pacifism and vegetarianism. Neither resembles our modern attitudes towards ethics, and deep-ken vegetarianism—unlike vegetarianism today—was only tenuously linked with ethics at all. We then shift to tracing the plain ken’s gathering strength, with a focus on Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount (SOM) and its consequences for the fifteenth century. Turning from

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1 Exposition on the Gospel of St. Matthew and St. John, Cambridge, Trinity College, MS B.1.38, fol. 15r.

theory to practice, the rest of the chapter looks at case studies, at a series of people who taught, and sometimes lived, varying sets of ethical values between the two kens.

## Jesus Ethics and the Deep Ken

In the fifteenth century, it was not obvious that Jesus's ethical instructions should be followed. Geoffrey Chaucer (ca. 1340s–1400) recognized a rare person who put Jesus's teachings into practice in his Parson: "Christ's lore and his apostles twelve / He taught; but first he followed it himself."<sup>2</sup> Extraordinary among Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, the Parson's Tale was less a narrative than a pastiche of thirteenth-century penance literature. In it, we learn how to be good, and much of the instruction derived from Jesus, but not in a way we might expect, not from his moral teachings. Thinking, speaking, and doing sinful things were wrong because they angered Jesus. Sowing discord was wrong because Jesus hated it. Similarly, greed was wrong because it suggested you loved your possessions more than Jesus.<sup>3</sup> These behaviours did not upset Jesus because they were bad; they were bad because they upset Jesus.

For Chaucer's Parson, ethics also came through the deep ken from convergence and dissonance with aspects of Jesus's life. Virginity was good because both Jesus and his mother were virgins. Nobles with expensive horses erred because Jesus only rode a donkey. Although nature would have us love our friends more than our enemies, the example of Jesus dying for his enemies supplemented an SOM quotation to remind us that our enemies needed our love more than our friends. At length, the text condemned short jackets "that through their shortness cover not the shameful members of man, to wicked intent," or that "show the bulge of their shape, and the horrible swollen members, that seem like the malady of hernia," by which "the buttocks of them fare as it were the back part of a she-ape in the full of the moon," all because they were incompatible by the modesty exemplified by Jesus.<sup>4</sup>

None of these ethical requirements derived from Jesus's teaching, but from Jesus's preferences, his examples, and his christology; actions spoke louder than words. The Parson quoted Jesus's SOM injunction "you shall not swear" (Mt 5:34), but rested his argument on the assertion that swearing dismembered Jesus,

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2 Geoffrey Chaucer, *General Prologue*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1987), lines 527–28.

3 Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Parson's Prologue and Tale*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Benson, lines 110–11, 642–43, 741–48. I have modernized the language slightly in my quotations.

4 *Ibid.*, lines 422–35, 521–31, 950.

and ripped him apart, which one did not want to do, because the Jews already had. The Lord's Prayer was valued less for its actual content than because it was short, inclusive—containing all other prayers—and was given to us by Jesus.<sup>5</sup>

For Chaucer, there was no obvious and explicit "Ethical Code Taught by Jesus." The Dominican preacher Johann Herolt (d. 1468) had a similar understanding. He acknowledged that human circumstances facilitated a chain of bad behaviours: gambling led to cursing (when the gambler lost), theft (to fund the habit), and parental disobedience (presumably the gambler's parents had forbidden it). What made gambling especially wicked, however, was the deep-ken consonance between a dice-player's rolling a five and the number of Jesus's five wounds.<sup>6</sup>

One reason for the absence of a Jesus-Taught Ethical Code was that his law was unwritten, which caused consternation among some thinkers. Alonso de Espina (ca. 1410–64) noted that although once the Jews had a divine Mosaic law while non-Jews had natural law, with Jesus the Mosaic law became dead letter, and the new law was both divine and natural. Why did Jesus not write out his new law? Alonso supplied a variety of reasons. Some of these were plain-ken appeals to human psychology and to the historical customs of kings. Writing it out would imply an undignified arrogance. Great teachers, such as Socrates, and kings did not themselves write down their laws, but had witnesses record them instead.<sup>7</sup>

In general, however, Alonso approached the problem of Jesus's law from the deep ken. Did Jesus's law's non-written nature show consonance or dissonance with goodness and mildness? Because the universe was intentional, the fact that Jesus performed relatively few miracles proved that few were necessary, which in turn demonstrated that his law was easy to accept. In fact, Jesus did write his law, but in an abstract sense, in our bowels and hearts, since it was a law of love. Mt 28:20's "I will be with you always" proved that the Eucharist, and therefore the Church its steward, would endure as long as the world endures, which illustrated the excellence of the new law. Strikingly, his deep ken allowed Alonso to work outside of a normal linear time sequence. Part of the reason why Jesus's law was superior to Moses's was because it predated Moses: God

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5 Ibid., lines 587–604, 1038–44.

6 Ian Kingston Siggins, *A Harvest of Medieval Preaching: The Sermon Books of Johann Herolt*, OP (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris Corp., 2009), 252.

7 Alonso de Espina,  *Fortalitium fidei contra Judeos et Sarracenos* (Lyons: Gueynard, 1511). See Steven J. McMichael, "Alfonso de Espina on the Mosaic Law," in *Friars and Jews in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. Susan E. Meyers and Steven J. McMichael (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 199–223.

revealed Jesus's law at the moment Abraham accepted God, four hundred and thirty years before he revealed Moses's law.<sup>8</sup>

One example of John Wycliffe's (ca. 1328–84) logic was an even deeper embedding of Jesus's law, in the very structure of truth. Jesus, he explained, could have exercised something like the absolute powers of God to threaten *comminatorie* [warningly] an eternal punishment that did not exist: "Christ could have been lying through his entire scripture about the perpetual punishment of sin, saying this only to terrify his church." In that case, however, every rational creature would be saved, which was impossible.<sup>9</sup> That is, lying being allowable implied the possibility that Jesus lied, which implied the possibility that there was no eternal punishment, an obvious untruth. Therefore, lying was forbidden.

### Pacifism

Uncertainty had long haunted understandings of Jesus's attitude towards violence. Mt 10:34 suggested Jesus's approval: "I came not to send peace, but the sword." Still, the medieval scribe who penned the Book of Kells was so startled by this that he understood it as an error and corrected the word *gladium* [sword] to *gaudium* [joy]: "I came not [only] to send peace, but [also] joy."<sup>10</sup>

Because Jesus's law was untaught, and ancient, it could avoid the inconvenient peace-celebrating passages of the SOM. Peace was not necessarily desirable. In theory, war was an instrument of the state, organized by the king for the common good, and not for glory. Wars were normal, and could be seen as tools to achieve a more favourable peace. If you won a war, God supported your cause; if you lost, God was punishing you for your sins.<sup>11</sup>

Peace appears to have been no more obvious to Richard II (1367–99). Philippe de Mézières (ca. 1327–1405) (once Chancellor of Cyprus, then advisor to Charles VI) wrote a treatise (ca. 1394) to Richard II asking that he end the war with France. The value of peace was far from self-evident. Mézières had to cite examples from the Bible, the Church Fathers, and history. More pragmatically, he insisted that a ruler was better off surrendering two thirds of a desired object than to fight over it and perhaps lose it entirely. Nor was this peace intended as a good in itself: it was good because it sets the groundwork for a crusade against

8 Alonso de Espina, *Fortalitium*, fol. 14r, 57v, 100v.

9 John Wycliffe, *De veritate sacrae scripturae*, ed. Rudolf Buddensieg, 3 vols. (London: Trübner, 1906), II, 53.

10 Trinity College Dublin, MS 58, fol. 58v.

11 Christopher Allmand, *The Hundred Years Wars: England and France at War c. 1300–c. 1450*, rev. ed. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1989), 53, 72.

Jerusalem by the Order of the Passion of Christ.<sup>12</sup> The presentation copy of this treatise has powerful illustrations, including the Crown of Thorns shining light onto the Crowns of France and of England which flank it, attended by a “Pax vobis” [Peace with You] and a giant YHS dominating fields of French fleurs-de-lis and of English lions.<sup>13</sup>

Warfare and violence had their real and rhetorical attractions, often expressed in Jesus terms. The English Taborite Peter Payne (ca. 1380–1455) referred to Jesus as “a most invincible soldier and Prague Warrior.”<sup>14</sup> There was a glory and manliness in battle, even in spiritual battle: one fifteenth-century sermon manual, a translation of a work composed two centuries previous, described St. Anthony in the desert surviving two attacks by demons, the second with Jesus’s assistance. When Anthony asked Jesus where he was during the first attack, Jesus answered that he had wanted to just watch, and was pleased that Anthony “has manly overcome thy enemies.”<sup>15</sup> The Irish poet Tadhg Óg Ó Dálaigh (fl. 1520) praised Jesus as a peace-maker who galloped into the midst of battle only to be heroically wounded.<sup>16</sup> This was a violent peace linked up to the suffering of Jesus.

We can also see deep-ken attitudes towards violence by looking at the actual fighting of the Hundred Years War, and in particular at the attitude of Joan of Arc (ca. 1412–31). The Maid of Orléans waged a war with powerful deep-ken associations between heaven and earth that would have eluded a plain-ken general. She carried her Jesus banner into battle “to avoid killing anyone.” Joan worried that her army’s sins might be a military disadvantage, by provoking God’s disfavour. On Ascension Day, she decided that a good ritual was the best offence: she took Communion rather than engage the enemy, and ordered her

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12 Philippe de Mézières, *Letter to King Richard II*, trans. G. W. Coopland (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 1975), 51–53, 124–27.

13 BL Royal MS 20 B VI, fol. 1v.

14 Thomas A. Fudge, ed., *The Crusade against Heretics in Bohemia, 1418–1437* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 259–61. For context, see Martin Pjecha, “Spreading Faith and Vengeance: Human Agency and the ‘Offensive Shift’ in the Hussite Discourses on Warfare,” *The Bohemian Reformation and Religious Practice* 10 (2015): 157–84 (173).

15 Étienne de Besançon, *An Alphabet of Tales: An English 15<sup>th</sup> Century Translation of the Alphabetum Narrationum*, ed. Mary Macleod Banks (London: Early English Text Society, 1904), 55.

16 Salvador Ryan, “‘Scarce Anyone Survives a Heart Wound’: The Wounded Christ in Irish Bardic Religious Poetry,” in *Wounds and Wound Repair in Medieval Culture*, ed. Larissa Tracy and Kelly DeVries (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 291–312 (301), [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004306455\\_015](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004306455_015)

men to confession. She asserted that anyone fighting against her was fighting Jesus.<sup>17</sup>

War, in the mainstream view, was not necessarily a bad thing, and was sometimes a necessary thing. The benefits of peace were uncertain. Pacifists were not idealists, but social and political subversives.

We can see both the hesitation about peace, as well as its deep-ken conceptualization, in the writings of a representative, respectable establishment figure. Thomas Brinton (d. 1389) was well and widely liked. After years of service to Urban V (1310–70) at Avignon and Rome, Urban's successor Gregory XI (ca. 1329–78) appointed him Bishop of Rochester (1373), a small diocese perhaps chosen so that no large administrative burden would distract the papal favourite from preaching and diplomacy. Brinton served as royal confessor, and thus gave the sermon at the coronation of Richard II. Parliament sought his advice, and the rebellious peasants of 1381 asked him to be their spokesman.<sup>18</sup>

Brinton is most useful to us for his many extant sermons, often preached at St. Paul's Cross in London; these give us an idea of what a mainstream Christian teacher thought of peace. Around 1400 in England, there was a general shift of focus from the glories of war to its miseries, but still many shared the mainstream attitude to the causes of war: God used war to punish a sinful people and a corrupt Church.<sup>19</sup>

Brinton did not assume his audience had a positive attitude towards peace, and he had to argue that God and Jesus favoured it. He noted that God the Father so loved peace as to have his angels announce "Peace on Earth" upon the Nativity of his Son. His Son also loved peace, even ending the farewell to his disciples with "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you" (Jn 14:27). After the Resurrection, Jesus reappeared to them—"like a sun in the middle of a universe to be illuminated, like a heart in the middle of an animal to be brought to life, like the centre in the middle of a circle to be joined together"—and greeted them with a "Peace be with you!" Brinton points out that we bequeath to our heirs

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17 Jules-Étienne-Joseph Quicherat, ed., *Procès de condamnation et de réhabilitation de Jeanne d'Arc, dite la Pucelle*, 5 vols. (Paris: Renouard, 1841–49), I, 78; V, 127; Régine Pernoud, ed., *Joan of Arc By Herself and Her Witnesses*, trans. Edward Hyams (Lanham: Scarborough House, 1994), 62; Joan of Arc, *Joan of Arc in Her Own Words*, ed. Willard Trask (New York: Turtle Point Press, 1996), 35.

18 Henry Summerson, "Brinton, Thomas (d. 1389)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (24 May 2008), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/3442>

19 Richard W. Kaeuper, *War, Justice, and Public Order* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980), 339–40.

whatever we hold most dear, and so Jesus's wishes that his disciples have peace proved its great importance for him.<sup>20</sup>

Brinton was aware of the plain-ken, human mechanisms of peace and its failure, and described a chain from "scornful and contemptuous words to lashes, from lashes to wounds, from wounds to murder." However, the reality remained much more complicated than that, and he could see a fuller picture. At a more profound, deep-ken level, peace was about two things: God and Unity. Peace was something that God made. Jesus came to earth to make peace between God and man, and between men. Jesus then "taught peace by preaching, perpetuated it by living, exhibited it by resurrecting, and left it by ascending." Jesus was the unifying sun from which all peace shone.<sup>21</sup>

What we have come to think of as peace—brotherly peace regulated by justice—was, for Brinton, but the last part of a stratified trinity, alongside (first) the peace a soul had when unburdened by conscience and (second) the peace achieved by obedience to God. Even the third peace was linked to God, for the one "who through discord stains the unity of brothers" in fact, like Judas, "betrays God, who is love." Instead, "a true penance makes a confirmed peace." To the deep ken, the problem was not that "discord" divided us from each other, but that it divided us from the truth of God. The Church was crucial to unity and peace: baptism and the mass made unity possible, and the priest performing the mass, when turned to the people at the elevation, "reveals himself the mediator between God and the people."<sup>22</sup>

In Florence, Girolamo Savonarola (1452–98) urged his audiences to strive for a more ethical life through imitation of, and love for, Jesus. Savonarola urged his audience to replace hatred of neighbour for love of Jesus. If we forgive our enemies, God will forgive Florence. Such loving relations should not be "simulated, but with heartfelt simplicity and truth." Replacing anger with love would allow Jesus to rule in your heart. This sentiment caught on in popular song. One anonymous laud, probably set to music from the 1496 carnival, asked "Jesus king, leader, and lord" to "live, live in our heart." Denouncing the practice of holding vendettas, Savonarola urged aggrieved Florentines to imitate Jesus, who had humbled himself, by letting go of past injustices. He advised his audience to "Let Christ be your captain, and let him be the one who gives you the reform of holy living. That reform is nothing other than union—that is, the love of God and the love of neighbour. This is nothing other than the commandment

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20 Thomas Brinton, *The Sermons of Thomas Brinton, Bishop of Rochester (1373–1389)*, ed. Mary Aquinas Devlin, 2 vols. (London: Royal Historical Society, 1954), II, 274 (sermon 60), 337–38 (73).

21 *Ibid.*, I, 16–17 (7); II, 273–74 (60).

22 *Ibid.*, I, 16–7 (7); II, 275 (60), 336–38 (73).



of God and of Christ.” One of Savonarola’s verses had Jesus saying “leave your sinning, since without me peace cannot be found.”<sup>23</sup>

The rightness of following Savonarola’s advice to forgive was not obvious. In his Lenten sermon on “love your enemies,” Giovanni Dominici (ca. 1355–1419) explained how difficult it was to love and pardon an enemy, especially when an injury was done in public or when the injurer was inferior in strength or family. In those cases, you would be justified, though not necessarily excused, for seeking vengeance. He told the story of a widow whose three sons, encouraged by their friends, asked her permission to make peace with their father’s murderers. She produced their father’s bloody shirt, declaring, “When this shirt be washed, [only then] make peace” with your enemies. This was not the story of a grieving widow’s bloodlust. Instead, as Dominici explained his allegory, the widow was the Church, the husband was Jesus crucified, the sons were ourselves, and the friends urging peace were demons. He applied this set-up to ethics by linking the enemies with our sins. Because of Jesus’s Passion, we should not make peace with our enemies, despite the demons’ urging. Thus, in Lent, we should not “make peace with these [our] miserable vices.”<sup>24</sup>

## Vegetarianism

Before turning to the issue of eating meat, we will consider how the fifteenth-century West thought about animals generally, and how Jesus conditioned that thinking. Medieval bestiaries had been mostly illustrative moral tracts, but by our period both zoology and ethics attracted writers’ interests.<sup>25</sup> Richard Rolle of Hampole (ca. 1300–49) wrote his “Nature of the Bee” not just about morals, but also about bees.<sup>26</sup> Some of this attention was positive. Kamal al-Din al-Damiri (1341–1405) wrote on animal psychology; he reported a conversation between Jesus and a snake who asserted that his master’s unethical behaviour makes

23 Savonarola, *Poesie di Ieronimo Savonarola*, ed. Audin di Rians (Florence: Baracchi, 1847), 21–32, 39–40; Savonarola, *Prediche sopra Aggeo*, ed. Luigi Firpo (Rome: Belardetti, 1965), 423. See John Koenig, “Mary, Sovereign of Siena, Jesus, King of Florence: Siege Religion and the Ritual Submission (1260–1637),” *Bullettino senese di storia patria* 115 (2008): 43–163 (113–15); Patrick Macey, *Bonfire Songs: Savonarola’s Musical Legacy* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), 63–65.

24 Biblioteca Riccardiana, Florence MS 1301, fol. 37r, 43r. See D. R. Lesnick, “Civic Preaching in the Early Renaissance,” in *Christianity and the Renaissance*, ed. Timothy Gregory Verdon and John Henderson (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse UP, 1990), 208–25 (217).

25 Ronald Baxter, *Bestiaries and their Users in the Middle Ages* (London: Courtauld Institute, 1998).

26 Richard Rolle, “The Nature of the Bee,” in *Fourteenth Century Verse and Prose*, ed. Kenneth Sisam (Oxford: Clarendon, 1921), 41–42.

his—the master’s—venom worse than the snake’s.<sup>27</sup> William Langland’s (ca. 1332–86) *Piers Plowman* described animals as intellectually superior: Reason “ruled all beasts, save man and his mate; many times and often no Reason followed them.”<sup>28</sup> The thirteenth-century Servasanto of Faenza considered animals morally superior to humans.<sup>29</sup>

Because of its special relationship with Jesus, the donkey stood out as extraordinary among non-human animals. The nun Alijt Bake (d. 1455) invited her readers to imagine Jesus’s Passion through the eyes of the donkey he rode on, a “simple, plump, scorned beast.”<sup>30</sup> In 1417, ‘Abd Allah al-Tarjuman (1355–1423) (see Chapter 6) wrote a fable-like piece that involved a dispute between animals and a human—portrayed as al-Tarjuman himself—on a fundamental question: should humans rule over animals, or vice versa? The animals, sportingly giving the humans an advantage, chose for their spokes-animal a “vile and miserable” donkey, “snotty-nosed, mangy, without a tail.” To support the dominion of humans, al-Tarjuman offered many reasons, ranging from our moral law and nice clothes, to astrology, to our pleasant odour. The donkey rebutted every argument: those nice silk and wool clothes were stolen from animals! Finally, however, the donkey’s fear was realized when al-Tarjuman happened upon the only winning argument: Jesus was incarnated as a human, not as a donkey.<sup>31</sup>

Some, often women, warned against animal cruelty, but their motivation did not come from modern ethical sensibilities, much as their contemporaries’ pacifism did not come from modern ethical sensibilities. Bridget of Sweden (ca. 1303–73) had a vision in which Jesus explained the suffering of animals:

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- 27 Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila, *Jeesus, Allahin Profeetta* (Helsinki: Suomen Eksegeettisen Seura 1998), 108, 228; Tarif Khalidi, ed., *The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2001), 208–10.
- 28 *Piers Plowman*, Text B, Passus XI, lines 369–71.
- 29 S. Bonaventura [attributed], “Sermones de sanctis totius anni,” in *Opera omnia*, ed. A. C. Peltier, 15 vols. (Paris: Vives, 1868), XIV, 1–138 (2, 92). Elsewhere, Servasanto notes that animals, like pagans and publicans (see Mt 5:46), love their neighbours. *Liber de virtutibus et vitiis*, Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, MS Conv. Soppr., E.VI.1046, fol. 40v. See Antonio Del Castello, “La tradizione del Liber de virtutibus et vitiis di Servasanto da Faenza” (PhD thesis, University of Naples Federico II, 2013), 188–92.
- 30 Alijt Bake, “De weg van de ezel,” ed. B. Spaapen, *Ons Geestelijk Erf* 42 (1968): 5–32 (11).
- 31 Anselm Turmeda, “Disputation of the Donkey: Selections,” ed. Neil Kenny, in *Cambridge Translations of Renaissance Philosophical Texts*, ed. Jill Kraye (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1997), 3–16 (6, 14–15). See Miguel Asín Palacios, *El original árabe de la “Disputa del asno contra fray Anselmo Turmeda”* (Madrid: Sucesores de Hernando, 1915); Lourdes María Álvarez, “Beastly Colloquies: Of Plagiarism and Pluralism in Two Medieval Disputations between Animals and Men,” *Comparative Literature Studies* 39 (2002): 179–200.

partly, they suffered so that they might die quicker, partly, because human sin disrupted all of creation: “if human sins did not demand it, animals, which are under human charge, would not suffer in so singular a manner.” Her Jesus urged that “people should therefore fear me, their God, above all things, and treat my creatures and animals more mildly, having mercy on them for the sake of me, their Creator.”<sup>32</sup> In a parallel direction, Catherine of Siena (1347–80) explained that a follower of Jesus should love God’s creatures because Jesus loved them, and “it is the nature of love to love what the beloved loves...”<sup>33</sup> Of Margery Kempe (ca. 1373–1438) it was said that “if a man beat a child before her or hit a horse or other beast with a whip, if she saw or heard it, she thought she saw our Lord being beaten or wounded, just as she saw it in the man or in the beast, either in the fields or in the town, and alone by herself as well as among people.”<sup>34</sup> The three disjunctions at the end of that sentence indicate that this was understood as a miraculous event, and something similar happened when Kempe saw a crucifix. She was not motivated by an ethical empathy for the horse, but because of a deep-ken consonance between a beaten horse and the Passion of Jesus. With the deep ken, Bridget defended animals because God made them, Catherine because God loved them, and Kempe because they suffered as Jesus suffered.

In general, animal lovers loved to eat animals. Most vegetarians declined to eat animals only because their flesh was luxurious and worldly.<sup>35</sup> Debates about the consumption of meat, such as that between Pierre d’Ailly (1351–1420) and Jean Gerson (1363–1429),<sup>36</sup> were often linked to the Lenten fast. Refraining from eating meat was an act of asceticism, not inter-species love. Such asceticism was controversial, not least because it suggested pride. One might argue that avoiding pork was bad, since God, in Genesis, affirmed that all of creation was good.<sup>37</sup> The Russian Sergius of Radonezh (1315–92) gave his bread to Arkuda, a hungry bear that came daily; this was generosity unattended by goodwill, for

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32 *The Revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden*, trans. Denis Searby, ed. Bridget Morris, 4 vols. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008–12), II, 309.

33 Catherine of Siena, *The Letters of Catherine of Siena*, trans. Suzanne Noffke, 4 vols. (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2000), I, 167.

34 Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, trans. B. A. Windeatt (London: Penguin, 1985), 104.

35 Rod Preece, *Sins of the Flesh: A History of Ethical Vegetarian Thought* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2008), 142.

36 Pierre d’Ailly, “Tractatus pro Carthusiensibus, quod rationabiliter abstinent ab esu carniū, sive Tractatus de non esu carniū,” in *Zur Geschichte der grossen abendländischen Schisma und der Reformconcilien von Pisa und Constanz*, ed. Paul Tshackert (Gotha: Friedrich Andreas Perthes, 1877), 25–28; Jean Gerson, “De non esu Carniū,” in OC, III, 77–95. Also Palémon Glorieux, “Gerson et les Chartreux,” *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 28 (1961): 115–53.

37 McMichael, “Alfonso de Espina on the Mosaic Law,” 216.

the bear was “like a wicked creditor who wishes to collect his due.”<sup>38</sup> After four years of abstaining, Kempe was ordered to eat meat by her confessor, who had heard complaints about her vegetarianism. She did begin to eat meat, but soon requested him to allow her to restart her fast.<sup>39</sup> Members of the strictly observant Carthusian order did not eat mammalian meat, and their refusal to give meat broth to members in ill health led to their reputation as “murderers of their sick.”<sup>40</sup>

On occasion, contemporary scholars wondered whether Jesus was himself a vegetarian, and usually concluded that he mostly was. Nicholas Love (d. ca. 1424) noted that “we find not” that Jesus ever ate meat, except at the Last Supper, which was “more for mystery than for bodily food.”<sup>41</sup> A deep-ken attitude towards canon underlies Love’s reasoning: the Bible did not mention Jesus eating meat (with the noted exceptions), so he did not. That Jesus made exceptions for symbolic reasons tends towards the deep ken, not because Jesus was especially hungry. Again, this is born of ascetic modesty, not a desire to be harmless. Joan of Arc was a pescatarian (except for the Eucharist), not out of love of animals but to consonate with Jesus.<sup>42</sup> Unusually, Johann Herolt took up the plain ken to contextualize Jesus’s diet within first-century Jewish culture: Jesus was as vegetarian as he could be at the time, but did eat lamb each year during Passover.<sup>43</sup>

The fifteenth century’s greatest friend to animals was Francis of Paola (1416–1507),<sup>44</sup> who—imitating Francis of Assisi (d. 1226), who was imitating

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38 Dmitrij Čiževskij, *History of Russian Literature: From the Eleventh Century to the End of the Baroque* (The Hague: Mouton, 1971), 174.

39 Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 97.

40 Nicholas Love, *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, ed. Michael G. Sargent (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2004), xlii. An exception can be found in the ca. 1400 moral treatise *Dives et Pauper*, which took “eat yet no flesh with blood” (Genesis 11) to forbid eating “cruel” meat. See Henry Parker, *Here Endith a Compendious Treetise Dyalogue. Of Diues [and] Paup[er], that is to Say, the Riche [and] the Pore Fructuously Tretyng Vpon the x. Co[m]mañmentes* (London: Pynson, 1493), fol. Qiii v. (precept 5, chapter 15).

41 Love, *The Mirror*, 147 (lines 33–35). Love was a Carthusian, which was a vegetarian order.

42 Colette Beaune, “Jeanne la Pucelle,” *Perspectives médiévales* 27 (2001): 21–36 (25–26).

43 Ian D. K. Siggins, *A Harvest of Medieval Preaching: The Sermon Books of Johann Herolt* (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris Corp., 2009), 129.

44 My main source for Francis is “[Vita] de S. Francisco de Paula,” in *Acta Sanctorum Aprilis*, ed. Godfrey Henschen and Daniel van Papenbroek, 68 vols. (Antwerp: Cnobarum, 1675), I, with translations from Gino J. Simi and Mario M. Segreti, *St. Francis of Paola* (Rockford, IL: Tan, 1977). See Ronald C. Finucane, *Contested Canonizations: The Last Medieval Saints, 1482–1523* (Washington, DC: Washington Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 117–66.

Jesus—combined a love of asceticism with a love of creation. His opponents mocked him as the *homo herbarius* [botanist man].<sup>45</sup>

In the Kingdom of Naples, on the Calabrian coast, in 1400 the godly farmer and Francis of Assisi devotee Giacomo Martolilla married a woman named Vienna. He, motivated by Francis, was vegan. Their efforts at procreation were unsuccessful until one night in 1415 an aurora borealis appeared directly over their house, to the confusion of their neighbours. Nine months later their son was born, named Francis after the saint.<sup>46</sup>

Francis's inherited vegetarianism informed a series of miracles. He resurrected his friends Martinello the Lamb and Antonella the Trout after they had been cooked—Martinello had also been eaten. He later restored to life another served fish in Bormes, France. He carried out, by hand, a nest of snakes that workers were about to immolate. When his host, Ferdinand I of Naples (1424–94), had him sent a plate of cooked fish, instead of eating them Francis resurrected the fish to life and turned the faux pas into a teaching moment: "Carry these dear little animals back to the King and tell him how I restored life to these poor fish. In this way I want him to restore liberty to those unfortunates who are unjustly kept buried in his prisons!"<sup>47</sup>

At Lauria, Francis asked a blacksmith to make shoes for another Martinello, a donkey. The smith obliged, but when he asked for payment, he was decidedly unimpressed with the poverty-embracing saint's attempt to put the work on Jesus's tab: "Rest assured that the blessed Jesus will recompense you generously for your act of charity." Unable to persuade the furious blacksmith, Francis told Martinello to remove the shoes, which he miraculously did. The blacksmith suddenly decided Jesus's credit was very good indeed, and was then keen to shoe Martinello, but Francis instead pressed on the 20 km to Lagonegro, where the local blacksmith did the work for free, without miraculous intervention.<sup>48</sup>

Already in 1435, when Francis was nineteen years old, he had attracted followers, and through his life he established hermitages for what became a new order, the Minims ("the least"), or more correctly the Poor Hermits of St. Francis of Assisi. Pope Paul II (1417–71) declined to approve the Minims' diet for fear that it would not supply sufficient nutrition, but Francis gave his followers, without papal approval, instructions to maintain the vegan regime.

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45 Finucane, *Contested Canonizations*, 123.

46 Simi and Segreti, *St. Francis of Paola*, 15–17; Henschen and van Papenbroek, ed., *Acta Sanctorum Aprilis*, 106–07, 195.

47 Henschen and van Papenbroek, ed., *Acta Sanctorum Aprilis*, 109–10, 117, 121, 130, 139–40, 153, 184, 199–200; Simi and Segreti, *St. Francis of Paola*, 26, 111, 128, 158.

48 Henschen and van Papenbroek, ed., *Acta Sanctorum Aprilis*, 203; Simi and Segreti, *St. Francis of Paola*, 103.

After Francis's death—on Good Friday, with its deep-ken significance—Pope Julius II (1443–1513) later approved this, in 1505–06.<sup>49</sup>

With Francis of Paola, we see a harmless-vegetarian combination rooted both in asceticism and in friendship with animals. Still, neither Francis nor the other people in this section approached eating meat as the right-or-wrong ethical debate it is today. Instead, it was about sense restraint and consonance with Jesus's diet.

## Developing a Plain-ken Ethics

The previous pages described a deep-ken attitude towards ethics, and pacifism and vegetarianism in particular: ethical truth was not taught by a wise, first-century Jewish rabbi, but was embedded in the intentional universe and amplified in the life of the living God. The rest of this chapter explores an alternative, plain-ken perspective that strengthened during this century. In Christianity, Jesus had been associated with ethical wisdom since the composition of the Gospels. In Islam, a number of traditions had long associated Jesus with ethical advice. Baha' al-Din al-Ibshihi (d. 1487) wrote anthologies that included Jesus giving moral teachings, such as "When someone turns a beggar away empty-handed, the angels will not visit his house for seven days" or "I treated the leper and the blind man and cured them both. I treated the fool and he made me despair. Silence is the [best] reply to the fool."<sup>50</sup>

In our period, some extremists among the Jesus ethicists experimented with a palpably plain-ken approach that emphasized history. Some Franciscans quested for the historical Jesus, understanding his life literally, because they wanted to live his ethics in their own human spacetime. A number of thinkers sought to historicize the Church. Essentially, plain-ken ethics were about understanding history to involve fundamental change. In particular, the plain ken saw two breaks: the first—within the canon itself—broke the Old Testament away from Jesus's call for perfection and completion in the New Testament. The Old Testaments' ethics could be identified with the "righteousness of old times" (Mt 5:20, 21, 27, 33) identified by Jesus in the New. For the extremists, the Old Testament entered plain-ken history—in a sense, it was pushed there by the New Testament, which captured Truth and combined the deep and plain kens into a new kind of earthly perfection to be achieved morally in the imitation of Jesus.

49 Simi and Segreti, *St. Francis of Paola*, 63, 122, 187, 208.

50 Quoted in Khalidi, *The Muslim Jesus*, 211.

The second break was the space between Jesus's New Testament and contemporary times, between which humans' ethical norms and tendencies collapsed. Henry of Langenstein described the transfer of authority from Moses's law to Jesus's, and then on to the Holy Spirit's, "like shadow into light."<sup>51</sup> The chain of authority between Biblical times and the fifteenth century was dubious, as illustrated by the failure of pope and emperor to live up to Jesus's ethical teachings. Therefore, it was necessary to jump back to the New Testament. Looking at these breaks, the plain ken could see human customs change over time but still sought to recover ethical teachings from the Jesus (New Testament) period. Petr Chelčický (ca. 1390–1460), to whom we turn below, spoke of a house burnt to the ground and warned against mistaking the ruins—human custom—for the true "foundation." We should instead seek the original intention of Jesus, best expressed in the SOM. A few located this second break specifically in the Donation of Constantine, the alleged fourth-century transfer by the Emperor Constantine of his plain-ken power over the western Roman Empire to the pope. Wycliffe, for example, recognized that transfer as the beginning of the ruin of the Church.<sup>52</sup> The plain ken opened Jesus's commandments up to a new circumstantial interpretation. Strict interpreters insisted these rules always held, but more liberal views made their validity dependent on circumstances—they applied at some times and not others.<sup>53</sup>

### The Sermon on the Mount

In the New Testament, many of the radical ethical teachings that forced a historical break with Old Testament mores are found in Jesus's Sermon on the Mount (SOM). Described in Matthew's Gospel, this sermon began with a series of beatitudes specifying who was blessed (the poor, the meek...), before launching into a series of moral instructions that called for a high level of acceptance and non-retaliation ("turn the other cheek").

In our period, the SOM teachings appeared in unexpected ways. The medieval *Evangelium secundum marcas argenti* [Gospel of Silver Mark] was still popular at the beginning of our century. The title punned on the two meanings of "Mark," as the name of the evangelist St. Mark and as a kind of coin, as in the

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51 Henry of Langenstein, "Contra quendam eremitam de ultimis temporibus vaticinantem nomine theolophorum," in *Thesaurus anecdotorum novissimus*, ed. A. R. P. Bernardo Pezio, 6 vols. (Augsburg: Philippi, Martini, and Joannis Veith Fratrum, 1721), I, col. 522.

52 Wycliffe, *Tractatus de ecclesia*, ed. Johann Loserth (London: Trübner, 1886), 360–70.

53 Bernardino of Siena, *Le prediche volgari (Firenze 1425)*, ed. Ciro Cannarozzi, 3 vols. (Florence: Libreria Editrice Fiorentina, 1940), II, 278–79.

now defunct Deutschmark. This playful, or mocking, attitude oozed throughout the work. Flipped around, the beatitudes reported how things actually were, not how Jesus wanted them to be: “Blessed are the rich, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are they that have, for they shall not be empty-handed. Blessed are they that have money, for theirs is the curia of Rome. Woe unto him that does not have it.”<sup>54</sup>

The SOM was also a common inspiration for the spiritual development of self and the spiritual correction of others. Sister Margareta of Kenzingen gave away her possessions to become a beggar, following Jesus’s instruction at Mt 19:21: “If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven.” Presumably drawing from Jesus’s blessings on the hated and persecuted (Mt 5:11–12, Lk 6:22), Margareta’s goal was to become “the most scorned person on earth.”<sup>55</sup> In contrast, Camilla Battista da Varano (1458–1524) used the “judge not” passage of the SOM (“Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?” Mt 7:1–5) to justify her advice to the man she loved, that he act more like a “lovable bride” than a servant fearing punishment or a prostitute seeking reward.<sup>56</sup>

In his *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* (see Chapter 4), Nicholas Love developed his own approach to Jesus and his teachings. When treating the SOM, Love emphasized poverty, and when treating the Passion, he emphasized meekness: “Our lord began this sermon first at poverty, doing us to understand, that poverty is the first ground of all spiritual (‘ghostly’) exercise. For he that is overlaid and charged with temporal goods and worldly riches may not freely and swiftly follow Christ, that is the mirror and example of poverty.” Love had his audience contemplate Jesus’s patience during his Passion: “Now take heed diligently to him, and have wonder of that great profound meekness of him, and in all much as thou may conform thee to follow him by patience and meekness and suffering of wrongs for his love.” He encouraged us to follow Jesus by noting how the disciples followed him: “Now behold how the disciples follow him and in [the] manner of chickens that follow the hen,” and snuggled up under her wings. Contemplating the Passion of Jesus with all your heart yielded joy and compassion and bliss.<sup>57</sup>

54 Martha Bayless, *Parody in the Middle Ages: The Latin Tradition* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 323, 330–31.

55 Johannes Meyer, *Women’s History in the Age of Reformation: Johannes Meyer’s Chronicle of the Dominican Observance*, trans. Claire Taylor Jones (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2019), 170.

56 Camilla Battista da Varano, *Le opere spirituali*, ed. Giacomo Boccanera (Iesi: Scuola Tipografia Franciscana, 1958), 180–81.

57 Love, *The Mirror*, 82, 156, 160, 171.



Of course, beyond the SOM other canonical passages expressed Jesus's teachings and life, and, beyond personal ethics, those teachings were applied to broader social challenges. We see expressions of a Jesus-based hostility to the powerful's abuse of their power. Jesus being executed did not slow capital punishment—Jesus was very different from a criminal—but Gerson noted that Jesus did die among criminals, the “poor Christians our brothers, for whose salvation he had received death.”<sup>58</sup> Henry of Langenstein (ca. 1325–97) used Jesus's expulsion of moneychangers from the Temple as a jumping-off point to argue that a merchant must not inflate the price of something he was selling because of expenses incurred in maintaining it.<sup>59</sup> One Glagolitic poem (ca. 1400) from the Balkans compared the monks' and Church officials' devotion to their “fat bellies,” in contrast to so-called heretics condemned for imitating Jesus.<sup>60</sup> In Newbury, the fuller Thomas Taylor (d. ca. 1491) described the Church elite as thieves, for they seized worldly goods in the name of Jesus.<sup>61</sup> Lorenzo Valla (1407–57) contrasted the Gospel with power, and put into Pope Sylvester's (285–335) mouth a hypothetical speech in which he scolded Constantine: “Truthfully, how will the innocence of priests possibly remain untarnished amidst riches, offices, and the administration of the affairs of the world? Have we then renounced worldly goods in order to acquire them in even greater abundance?” The Pope then quoted Jesus: “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”<sup>62</sup>

Similarly, Nicole Oresme (ca. 1320/25–82) used a plain-ken approach to Jesus to settle a debate about the ownership of money. If you sold something and received money in exchange, did you own that money, or did the ruler who coined it? One school of thought looked to Jesus's instruction to give back to Caesar what was Caesar's—that is, money (Mt 22:21, Mk 12:17, Lk 20:25)—which suggests that Jesus understood the ruler owned the money. The deep ken also noted the consonance between the ruler's actual face, and his face depicted on the coin. Oresme countered this argument with an emphasis on

58 Jean Gerson, “Requête pour les condamnés a mort,” in OC, VII, pt. 1, 342.

59 Odd Langholm, “The German Tradition in Late Medieval Value Theory,” *European Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 15 (2008): 555–70 (559), <https://doi.org/10.1080/09672560802480914>

60 Ivo Goldstein, *Croatia: A History*, trans. Nikolina Jovanović (London: Hurst and Co., 2019), 29.

61 Anne Hudson, *The Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 4.

62 The Jesus quotation is from Acts 20:35. Lorenzo Valla, *The Profession of the Religious and selections from The Falsely-Believed and Forged Donation of Constantine*, trans. Olga Zorzi Pugliese, 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed. (Toronto: Centre for Renaissance and Reformation Studies, 1994), 97–98. See also Salvatore I. Camporeale, “Lorenzo Valla's Oratio on the Pseudo-Donation of Constantine: Dissent and Innovation in Early Renaissance Humanism,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 57 (1996): 9–26 (21–22).

looking at the historical circumstance: it was clear that Jesus is speaking in a situation involving a convention of tribute payment. The ruler owned the money not because of his image on the coin, but because of the fiscal context.<sup>63</sup>

John Wycliffe used the SOM to develop criticisms especially of the papacy, using both the plain and deep kens. With the plain ken, he contrasted the “poor particular church cramped in a corner” of the western part of the Far West, headed by the pope, with the dissimilar Holy Church of all Christians. Numerous Christians—even, thinking of the first-century context, Jesus—were in the latter, but not the former. The papacy was holy, and popes who followed Jesus and modelled Peter were real popes and should be obeyed as such. In his own day, however, Wycliffe observed that popes more closely matched the Matthew 24’s description of false Christs, those “false messiahs and false prophets” who would “appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive.” A deep-ken solution could address this plain-ken breakdown: we should ignore papal claims to authority superior to Jesus, but respect papal deeds that suggested consonance with Jesus, “for,” Wycliffe explained, “it were a great wonder that Christ should make his vicar the man that most contraries him in manner of living.” At the end of the day, Wycliffe emphasized ethics over the hollow authority of high office.<sup>64</sup>

Could you kill someone who slapped you? In general, Jesus’s instruction in the SOM, to turn the other cheek, was difficult for Christian minds in this period to accept fully. There was general agreement that it was usually good to flee someone who had slapped you. “Of course,” there were also exceptions: a fifteenth-century Sicilian theologian decided that only social inferiors were obliged to flee in order to avoid killing; the elite, of course, could fight back.<sup>65</sup>

The association between Jesus, the SOM, and ethics was so strong as to resonate even in Islam. We do see harmlessness esteemed in the Muslim subcult, but even there it was usually explicitly associated with the Christian subcult. Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406) cited “their book”: “Whoever strikes you on your right cheek, turn to him your left cheek.” He thus explained that Christians had

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63 Nicholas Oresme, *The De Moneta of Nicholas Oresme and English Mint Documents*, trans. Charles Johnson (London: Nelson, 1956), 10–11.

64 John Wycliffe, *Tractatus de potestate pape*, ed. Johann Loserth (London: Trübner, 1907), 79–87, 118–26, 147–52; John Wycliffe, “The Function of the Secular Ruler” [*Tractatus de Regibus*], in *Selections from English Wycliffite Writings*, ed. Anne Hudson (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1978), 129.

65 Nicolò de’ Tudeschi (Panormitanus) (1386–1445), *Abbatis Panormitani Commentaria in Tertium Decretalium Librum* (Venice: 1571), 5.17.1 (137v–38r), 2.25.8 (17rv). In contrast, Gerson felt that social status did not matter here. See Albert R. Jonsen and Stephen Toulmin, *The Abuse of Casuistry: A History of Moral Reasoning* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988), 223.

“outlawed strife.”<sup>66</sup> Additionally, we might look to the poems of Hafiz (1325–90) (see Chapter 20). In one, he flexed his harmlessness while showing off his weak biceps: “Very grateful am I to my arm / Because I lack the strength of an injurer of men.” Hafiz’s inspiration here likely came from Amin al-Din al-Balyani (d. 1345), who wrote in *Tark-i azari* [Avoiding Causing Distress to Others]: “Whoever causes distress and annoyance [*azar*] to God’s servants proves himself devoid of faith in God. There is no greater sin [*gunah*] than distressing someone’s heart, nor is there any more meritorious act of devotion than bringing joy to someone’s heart.” Al-Balyani might have been Hafiz’s Sufi master, and Hafiz used the same key terms *gunah* and *azar* in his own writings. In turn, al-Balyani’s inspiration originated with Jesus, even from the Jesus of the Christian Gospel. After citing ‘Abdullah Ansari (1006–88), al-Balyani went on to cite and quote a verse from the SOM (Mt 5:44).<sup>67</sup>

## Ethics in Theory and Practice

We can get a better sense of how these overarching themes—obedience to Jesus’s SOM instructions, historical breaks between the Old and New Testaments, and between the New Testament and contemporary times—play out in practice by considering a series of case studies: the Waldensian “Poor” of southern France, John Wycliffe and Nicholas of Hereford (d. 1420) in England, Jan Hus (ca. 1370–1415), Nicholas of Dresden, Petr Chelčický, and Luke of Prague (d. 1528) in Bohemia, and Desiderius Erasmus (1466–1536) in the Netherlands.

## The Poor

We find a more plain-ken perspective in some socially marginal thinkers’ embrace of an extreme, non-violent peace, usually linked to the SOM. To see the origins of this movement in the Late Traditional Far West, we need to back up a few centuries.

The Poor’s origins were obscure. In twelfth-century Lyons, in France, a man named Vaudès (or Valdo, or Valdes) had read the Bible and realized the importance of sharing the Gospel. He identified obstacles to its spread—his own

66 Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *Quranic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1991), 224–25.

67 Hafiz, *The Collected Lyrics of Hāfiz of Shīrāz*, trans. Peter Avery (Cambridge, UK: Archetype, 2007), 395, ghazal 318. See Denise Aigle, “Sainteté et Miracles: Deux Saints Fondateurs en Iran Méridional (XI<sup>e</sup> et XIV<sup>e</sup> S.),” *Oriente Moderno* 93 (2013): 79–100; Leonard Lewisohn, *Hafiz and the Religion of Love in Classical Persian Poetry* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2015).

wealth, the Gospel being kept in Latin, and priests' monopoly on preaching—and moved against them. He embraced voluntary poverty and sent out lay teachers, male and female, equipped with the Gospels in the vernacular. In those days, the importance of being a priest was so great that legend gave Valdes a churchly first name, Peter, and made him into a priest. The brothers of the Poor of Christ, or the Poor of Lyons, were usually called Waldensians by their enemies and their historians.<sup>68</sup>

Church authorities did not necessarily object to poverty, but they did object to preachers without even the basic competence guaranteed by priestly training—or even by literacy, as many Poor preachers could not read and relied instead on their memorization of scripture, especially the Gospels: seeing a potential for error, and a potential for that error spreading widely, the Church made violent efforts to prevent this, killing thousands of Poor who refused to recant. Nonetheless, the Poor spread across central Europe.<sup>69</sup> They moved west to Gascony, and south through the Dauphiné, to Provence. In the east, the movement travelled even further, firstly into Piedmont and down through Lombardy into Apulia and Calabria, secondly along the Rhine into the Low Countries, and finally following the Danube into Württemberg, Bavaria, Styria, Austria, and thence northeast into Saxony, Bohemia, and Moravia, and further north through Brandenburg, Silesia, and even to Pomerania on the Baltic Sea.<sup>70</sup>

Early in the fourteenth century, inquisitions had been set up in Piedmont, and in Styria, Bohemia, and Moravia. Despite the persecutions, the Poor survived into our period. We know of their existence mostly because the Church continued to try to reclaim them, and its inquisitions kept records. A new wave of persecution occurred as our period began. In the 1392–94 inquisition alone, inquisitor Peter Zwicker (d. 1403) processed thousands of suspected Poor; almost two hundred depositions survive. Because of the tremendous expansion earlier, not all the Poor caught up in inquisition records were converts: many suspects at Stettin said they had inherited the beliefs from their parents. In Piedmont, the Poor

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68 See Edwin A. Sawyer, "The Waldensian Influence on the Moravian Church," *Transactions of the Moravian Historical Society* 25 (1988): 47–61; Reima Välimäki, *Heresy in Late Medieval Germany: The Inquisitor Petrus Zwicker and the Waldensians* (Woodbridge: UK York Medieval, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781787444232>; J. K. Zeman, "Restitution and Dissent in the Late Medieval Renewal Movements: The Waldensians, the Hussites and the Bohemian Brethren," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 44 (1976): 7–27.

69 For example, Stephan Bodecker, Bishop of Brandenburg (1421–59), "Item pro maiori parte sunt illiterati et scripturam in corde retinentes," in *Quellen zur Ketzergeschichte Brandenburgs und Pommerns*, ed. Dietrich Kurze (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1975), 280.

70 Gabriel Audisio, *The Waldensian Dissent: Persecution and Survival, c.1170–c.1570*, trans. Claire Davison (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1999), 61–62, 146, 150.

seems to have grown up rooted in older Cathar beliefs, for, by 1400, pockets of Catharism might have still existed in Piedmont valleys. Cathars saw Jesus and the devil as both sons of God, and the devil as this world's creator. They perhaps influenced the Poor, although the Cathar emphasis on theology did not resonate with the Poor, and in time sprouted into unorthodox magical practices.<sup>71</sup>

The Poor imitated Jesus. In the fifteenth century, in the southern regions their preachers were called "barbes," perhaps a reference to their beards. Because Jesus renamed Simon "Peter," barbes took new names when they became barbes. They travelled in pairs because Jesus had thus dispatched his own disciples.<sup>72</sup>

What did they believe? The more skilled inquisitors, after interrogating Poor, discerned that rumours of sexual deviance, devil worship, and hidden wealth had no basis in reality. At Stettin in 1392, one Herman Gossaw, born Poor, explained to the inquisition the core beliefs his parents had taught him: "Do not take oaths, do not lie, do not speak ill of others, do not get angry, do not testify falsely."<sup>73</sup> Another manuscript, the *Noble Leçon* [Noble Lesson] (ca. 1400), explained, with some exasperation, "If there are some who love and fear Jesus Christ, who wish not to malign others, nor to take oaths, nor to lie, nor to commit adultery, nor kill, nor steal from another, nor seek vengeance, they say he is a Waldensian and worthy of punishment."<sup>74</sup> From these values, loosely tied to the SOM, came two general clusters of beliefs which most, but not all, Poor held.

The first cluster of Poor beliefs was to resist evil and to oppose capital punishment and war. The Poor (as would, later, Wycliffites and Hussites) looked to the Donation of Constantine as the Church's great disaster. The SOM idea that most commanded the Poor's attention was the teaching against swearing oaths. This became their most easily detected belief, as it could out them immediately in court when they refused to swear to tell the truth.<sup>75</sup> Their aversion to oath-swearing was such that some avoided even saying "truly" or "certainly" in conversation, and preferred to follow Mt 5:37 by sticking with yes

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71 Audisio, *Waldensian*, 40–41, 68; Peter Biller, *The Waldenses, 1170–1530: Between a Religious Order and a Church* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), 146–55, 195; Peter Biller, "The Waldenses 1300–1500," *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 217 (2000): 88–93; Peter Biller, "Goodbye to Waldensianism?" *Past & Present* 192 (2006): 3–33 (19), <https://doi.org/10.1093/pastj/gtl004>; Kathrin Utz Tremp, *Von der Häresie zur Hexerei: "Wirkliche" und imaginäre Sekten im Spätmittelalter* (Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 2008), 167–274, 441, 531.

72 Gabriel Audisio, *Preachers by Night: The Waldensian Barbes (15<sup>th</sup>–16<sup>th</sup> Centuries)* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 80–81; Audisio, *Waldensian Dissent*, 128–29 (Mk 6:7).

73 Kurze, ed., *Quellen zur Ketzergeschichte*, 88–89.

74 See Audisio, *Waldensian*, 153; Biller, *The Waldenses*, 109–10; Biller, "Waldenses," 84–86.

75 Audisio, *Waldensian*, 48–49; Biller, *Waldenses*, 205.

and no answers.<sup>76</sup> Because German, like English, used the same verb to refer to swearing either a judicial oath or an injudicious curse word, some orthodox Germans would ostentatiously swear obscenities to avoid being mistaken as Poor.<sup>77</sup> The Poor's aversion to killing was also derived from the SOM. One sermon (Prague, 1384) noted their reluctance to kill.<sup>78</sup> Under interrogation, one suspect reported hearing that it was better to pray for criminals than to execute them.<sup>79</sup>

The second cluster of Poor beliefs was against ecclesiastical overreach, purgatory, confessions, and priests in mortal sin attempting to perform the sacraments. The Stettin Poor believed the Lord's Prayer to be the only proper (not "irritating and inane") prayer, presumably because it was explicitly endorsed by Jesus.<sup>80</sup> They were taught to also say the Ave Maria as cover. This did not always work: two suspects, asked to recite the Ave Maria, began in Latin but due to their unfamiliarity with its text had to transition into German before the end.<sup>81</sup> The Poor did not recite fixed numbers of prayer repetitions, but instead said "long or short prayers, according to what seemed most expedient."<sup>82</sup>

The Poor show little consistency in their beliefs about, and practice of, the Eucharist (see Chapter 9). Some Poor celebrated the Eucharist using wine, bread, and fish. Many believed there was no real presence. Pointing out three-dimensional spatial issues, Jacques Ristolassio in 1395 explained that Jesus could not be alive in a consecrated host enclosed in a box any more than could a cow survive being buried underground.<sup>83</sup> Laurent Bandoria (a Piedmontese, then in Osasco in the Cluson valley) in 1387 declared that a "bad priest cannot create or consecrate as good a host as a good priest could make." Jean Pruzza believed any Poor could consecrate a host, but he held in any case a rather low christology: "Christ was not the true God, because God could not be killed."<sup>84</sup> In the 1390s,

76 Alexander Patschovsky and Kurt-Victor Selge, ed., *Quellen zur Geschichte der Waldenser* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Mohn, 1973), 74.

77 Johannes Nider, *De visionibus ac revelationibus* (Helmstadt: Typis Salomonis Schnorrii, 1692), 425.

78 Biller, *Waldenses*, 92.

79 Kurze, ed., *Quellen zur Ketzergeschichte*, 124.

80 Petrus de Pilichdorf, *Cum dormirent homines*, in *Lucae Tudens Episcopi Scriptores aliquot succedanei contra sectam Waldensium*, ed. Jacobo Gretsero (Ingolstadt: Angermarius, 1613), 257–59. The document, named for Mt 13:25 ("But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came..."), has been attributed to the Inquisitor Peter Zwicker. Biller, *Waldenses*, 233, discusses the question of authorship.

81 Audisio, *Waldensian Dissent*, 52–53, 106.

82 Kurze, ed., *Quellen zur Ketzergeschichte*, 280.

83 Giuseppe Boffito, "Eretici in Piemonte al tempo dal Gran Scisma (1387–1417)," *Studi e documenti di storia e diritto* 18 (1897): 391–402.

84 Girolamo Amati, ed., "Processus contra Valdenses in Lombardia Superiori, anno 1387," *Archivio Storico Italiano* 37 (1865): 3–52 (24, 39).

one Poor who consecrated the Eucharist was corrected by the others.<sup>85</sup> In 1388, Antonio Galosna, in the southwestern Alps, even denied the Incarnation.<sup>86</sup>

It is reckless to use interrogation records to reconstruct how people understood knowledge, but there was an odd disconnect within the Stettin Poor's comments on purgatory. They consistently denied its reality, but they also prayed for the dead in it, "hoped" for and "believed" in its existence.

At Stettin in 1393, Mette Döryngische said she had two faiths, contradictory on some points, simultaneously. Such secrecy and ambiguity annoyed the inquisitors, but it may reflect a sophisticated combination of a skeptical epistemology and a careful concern for the well-being of the deceased. The inquisitor Zwicker argued that religious beliefs should be displayed openly, but one Poor pointed out that Nicodemus met Jesus secretly at night.<sup>87</sup>

## John Wycliffe

If Thomas Brinton (see above) was the mainstream, the opposition had found an equal voice in the reforming theologian John Wycliffe. Jesus commanded fleeing persecution, not self-defence. It was impossible to wage war for fraternal charity, and so war was necessarily sinful. Anyone who participated in war lost, for war cultivated anger rather than patience. Wycliffe saw an ethical-historical break with Jesus. War was more "dangerous" now than in Old Testament times, before Jesus's new teachings; God no longer led us into battle to avenge injuries unto Him. "What, I ask, does it sound like but that the evangelical law is a law of patience and love, but the old law is a law of carnal exemplification and rigor?" Jesus never taught—Wycliffe's emphasis on Jesus's teachings should not be taken for granted—that a shepherd should use his crook to slaughter his sheep and lambs, for that is the "lore of Antichrist." Wycliffe did, however, give examples of where charity—in a sense much extended beyond our own sense of the word—permitted violence: one could defend the fatherland from an invasion if that defence benefited both the invader and the invaded. In addition, this "charity" allowed invasion of non-Christian lands for punishment or for conversion (see Chapter 7).<sup>88</sup>

85 Pilichdorf, *Cum dormirent homines*, 206.

86 Audisio, *Waldensian*, 94; Euan Cameron, *Waldenses: Rejections of Holy Church in Medieval Europe* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 175.

87 Kurze, ed., *Quellen zur Ketzergeschichte*, 155; Pilichdorf, *Cum dormirent homines*, 210–11. See Audisio, *Waldensian*, 48–53, 100.

88 John Wycliffe, *Tractatus de civili dominio*, ed. R. L. Poole and J. Loserth, 4 vols. (London: Trubner and Co., 1885–1904), II, 236–39, 249–50, 255–56, 260; Wycliffe, *Tractatus de officio regis*, ed. Alfred W. Pollard and Charles Saylor (London: Wyclif, 1887), 272–76; John Wycliffe, *Select English Works*, ed. Thomas Arnold, 3 vols.

Wycliffe's pacifist leanings occurred in a broader Jesus-based social vision. The rational, natural society Wycliffe imagined had no war, nor even the private property that could spark war. Wycliffe also used Jesus to justify obedience to tyrannical rulers, for Jesus obeyed Herod and Pilate, and paid taxes to Caesar, but Wycliffe authorized withholding taxes if that would trigger the downfall of the tyrant. He also employed Jesus's Golden Rule to conclude that slavery was rarely acceptable: Jesus legislated that we should love our neighbours as ourselves. A slave was a neighbour of a civil lord, who must therefore love him. Because "through natural instinct" lords hated slavery, a loving lord could not enslave his people.<sup>89</sup> Events like Despenser's Crusade (1383) against the forces of Clement VII (1342–94) annoyed Wycliffe, who insisted that the Pope "agitated a war against Christ himself."<sup>90</sup>

In 1382, Archbishop Courtenay (ca. 1342–96) summoned bishops and theologians to Blackfriars Monastery in London, a mile away from Bedlam Hospital, and laid before them twenty-four propositions drawn from Wycliffe's writings.<sup>91</sup> Ten propositions were condemned, including Wycliffe's teachings on the Eucharist. The Archbishop invoked Jesus's image of wolves in sheep's clothing (Mt 7:15) to urge vigilance against the "false prophets" that were heretics. In particular, they condemned the article that "God ought to obey the devil."<sup>92</sup> Wycliffe had indeed explained that Jesus obeyed Judas (by washing his feet), Pilate, and the devil (as during the Temptation), all actions that happened in history and were demonstrated by reference to canon. This should not shock, Wycliffe soothed his reader, because obedience was a property of the goodness of the one obeying, not of the one obeyed.<sup>93</sup> Dominion could be given even to the devil, if God so willed it. In any case, an earthquake disrupted the trial. The deep ken sought meaning in the earthquake. Wycliffe roared that

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(Oxford: Clarendon, 1869), I, 367 (sermon 72). See Rory Cox, "Natural Law and the Right of Self-Defence According to John of Legnano and John Wyclif," in *Fourteenth-Century England VI*, ed. Christopher Given-Wilson (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2010), 149–70 (162–67), <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781846158025.009>; Ben Lowe, *Imagining Peace: A History of Early English Pacifist Ideas* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 38–41.

- 89 Wycliffe allowed for some exceptions to this. Wycliffe, *De civili dominio*, 199–206, 227–28, 235.
- 90 John Wycliffe, "Cruciata," in *Polemical Works in Latin*, ed. Rudolf Buddensieg, 2 vols. (London: Trübner, 1883), II, 595.
- 91 Henry Ansgar Kelly, "Trial Procedures against Wyclif and Wycliffites in England and at the Council of Constance," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 61 (1998): 1–28.
- 92 David Wilkins, ed., *Concilia Magnae Britanniae et Hiberniae*, 4 vols. (London: Gosling, Gyles, Woodward, Davis, 1737), III, 157–58.
- 93 Wycliffe, *De officio regis*, 40–41, 98–103, 188–93; Wycliffe, *Sermones*, ed. Johann Loserth (London: 1887–90) II, 310–12 (sermon 43); III, 467–68 (sermon 54); Wycliffe, *Select English Works*, III, 434–38.



this council had “put a heresy upon” Jesus, and therefore the earth quaked to repeat the earthquake that had marked the Crucifixion.<sup>94</sup> On the other hand, the Archbishop airily explained that the earth was merely farting out the fowl air in its bowels, just as the Church was trying to expel its heresies.<sup>95</sup>

### Nicholas of Hereford

Wycliffe’s many followers did not escape Courtenay’s efforts. The Archbishop had sent the Carmelite friar Peter Stokes (d. 1399) to Oxford to spy on the Ascension Day sermon delivered outdoors at the cross of St. Frideswide’s churchyard by a provocative recent Doctor of Theology: Nicholas of Hereford spoke at the invitation of the university’s Chancellor Robert Rygge (d. 1410). Courtenay had written Rygge to scold him for “without hesitation” inviting Nicholas to give such an important sermon and told him to cooperate with Stokes. Rygge, annoyed by external interference in university affairs, as his first act of “cooperating” gave the friar a treacherous bodyguard of a hundred armed men with instructions to take him out—kill or restrain—if necessary. While criticizing another sermon, Stokes noticed that some scholars near him had weapons sloppily concealed under their robes.<sup>96</sup>

Neither the Archbishop nor his Carmelite spy could stop Nicholas from preaching. Nicholas denounced the avarice and materialism of the religious clergy—the “possessioners,” he called them—and argued, with the plain ken, that reforming the Church could lessen the tax burden on the poor, thus reducing rebellion. Nicholas urged his audience to limit the money they gave to the religious orders, whose members should in fact lose their endowments and do manual labour. He appealed to his lay audience to act with confidence, “because I know certainly that the almighty God himself wants it to happen.”<sup>97</sup>

94 Wycliffe, *Select English Works*, III, 503. See Herbert B. Workman, *John Wyclif: A Study in the English Medieval Church*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1926), II, 268; Kelly, “Trial Procedures,” 9.

95 Thomas Netter, *Fasciculi Zizaniorum Magistri Johannis Wyclif cum Tritico*, ed. Walter Waddington Shirley (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, and Roberts, 1858), 272–73; John Wycliffe, *Dialogus*, trans. Stephen Lahey (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2013), 9, 269 (4.27), 298 (4.27), 349 (sup. 8).

96 See Hudson, *Premature Reformation*, 71–73; Simon Forde, “Hereford, Nicholas (b. c.1345, d. after 1417),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (24 May 2008), <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-20092>

97 Simon Forde, ed., “Nicholas Hereford’s Ascension Day Sermon, 1382,” *Medieval Studies* 57 (1989): 205–41 (240–41).

This do-it-yourself emphasis in the ending of his Ascension Day sermon was more fully developed in the treatise *Seven Deadly Sins*, in a specifically pacifist direction.<sup>98</sup>

Nicholas's peace spoke to both kens. He pointed to the bad reasons that motivated people to fight, which were many, given rulers' stupidity: "And certainly an earthly prince is commonly proud, and lacks the wit to teach when men should fight." Anger causes us to lose the friendship of our friends and the love of God. People attack their enemies to achieve peace. Such foolishness is understandable, as fighting comes naturally to humans (as an adder strikes the heel that stomps him) and had been lawful under the Old Law.<sup>99</sup>

Jesus, however, taught peace: "Jesus Christ, duke of our battle, taught us law of patience, and not to fight bodily." With the deep ken, Nicholas could extrapolate a wider rule from a specific action of Jesus. For example, Jesus's injunction to sell clothing to purchase swords (Lk 22:36) was actually, Nicholas interpreted, an instruction to "speak meekly, both in cause of God and worldly causes." Nicholas used Judas as a counterexample, pointing out that even Judas's betraying kiss was "more a token of charity" than riding into battle against an enemy. Christians should not seek their own good, but the common good in heaven. It was precisely the failure to preach Jesus's law that "makes strife among men. God's law teaches subjection and peace, and teaches the means hereto, and forbids the contrary." Even papal approval did not justify war, because the pope was an "Antichrist, that by hypocrisy reverses Jesus Christ in his false lying." "Battle," Nicholas condemned, "is cursed."<sup>100</sup>

Inviting imitation, Nicholas also used Jesus's example as an argument for peace:

For well I read that Christ blamed St. Peter, for he would defend Christ's life by smiting of sword. Also I read that Christ would not take vengeance of Samaritans, when they held his own goods from him and his apostles, and denied him thus both food and shelter. But Christ said he was not come to let thus men's lives.

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98 Wycliffe [prob. Nicholas of Hereford], "On the Seven Deadly Sins," in *Select English Works*, III, 119–67. This work had long been attributed to Wycliffe, although now scholarship prefers Nicholas, given that it lacks Wycliffe's obsession with the Eucharist and was written in a delightful western dialect. Wycliffe was from the north, born a mere eighty miles from the Scottish border, while Hereford (not necessarily his birthplace, but perhaps a clue) is less than twenty miles from the Welsh border.

99 *Ibid.*, 135–38.

100 *Ibid.*, 137–40, 148.

Also Christ is a good herdsman for this condition, that he puts his own life for saving of his sheep.<sup>101</sup>

The key was patience. Even animals (except snakes) taught patience; therefore, we should “vanquish by patience, and come to rest and to peace by suffering of death.” If people took our kingdoms and our goods, we should suffer in patience. God loved Jesus’s suffering and hated his tormenters, and we should follow God’s preferences. Nicholas explained the final goal, that “men have peace, and strifes should sleep.”<sup>102</sup>

Nicholas developed an extended argument against those who claimed, or were seen to have, the right to kill. First, he attacked the idea that knights’ violence was praiseworthy. Fighting to reclaim a title against a just man was wicked—even if he had inherited it from a usurper. We praise neither hangmen nor butchers, and these kill more frequently than knights, for better reasons:

Why should not this butcher, for his better deed, be praised more than this knight [...] And so it were better to man to be butcher of beasts than to be butcher of his brethren, for that is more unkindly. The passion of Christ is much for to praise, but slaying of his tormentors is odious to God Lord...<sup>103</sup>

Second, once he had shown that knights should not kill, he argued *a fortiori* that others had even less justification. If lay people should not fight, priests—vicars of Christ—*obviously* should not fight. If knights should not fight, then their subjects *obviously* should not fight. If crusaders should not fight, then the pope *obviously* should not fight, just as the Jewish high priests (analogous to the pope) were more guilty than Pilate or Jesus’s torturers (analogous to the crusaders) for having authorized that torture in the first place. Nicholas thus set up, rhetorically, a hierarchy based on the right to kill—

butchers and executioners  
knights  
priests, popes, and subjects  
—before collapsing it into a universal prohibition on violence.<sup>104</sup>

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Courtenay, saw the potential danger in Nicholas’s ideas. In June 1382, he summoned Nicholas to appear before the Blackfriars Council, where the young theologian alternated between principled

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101 Ibid., 141.

102 Ibid., 137–39, 147.

103 Ibid., 139–40.

104 Ibid., 141–47.

stands and moderation. He was found guilty, excommunicated, and fled to Italy, where he appealed directly to Pope Urban VI (ca. 1318–89). That pope, no less aware of the potential danger, sentenced Nicholas to life imprisonment. In 1385, the Charles III (1345–86), King of Naples, besieged the Pope in Nocera, which sparked a popular insurrection. In the chaos, Nicholas escaped back to England and (1387) into the clutches of the Archbishop, who arrested him. King Richard ordered Nicholas's writings confiscated (1388–89).<sup>105</sup>

Such persecution encouraged Nicholas to reconsider his non-violence. In or just before 1391, he recanted his heresy at St. Paul's Cross and, now under royal protection, became a heresy-hunter for the Church. The Church needed his help, for Nicholas's recanting had not entirely smothered out the idea of non-violence. Citing the Bible, William Swynderby (d. 1392) and Walter Brut contrasted Jesus's pro-love law with the pope's pro-war law and were brought to trial for heresy in 1393. Against Swynderby and Brut's pacifism, a group of Cambridge professors composed a defence of war: the defence of the kingdom, of justice, and of the Church all justified violence. Brut and Swynderby's idea that even self-defence was illicit was condemned as "against the good of the common peace, and against all government [*policiam*] and all reason." As an authority the professors, annoyed, cited "almost the whole Old Testament." Nicholas joined the persecution against the pacifists.<sup>106</sup>

In 1395, the Lollards, Wycliffe's followers, presented Twelve Conclusions to the English Parliament, the tenth of which prohibiting "manslaughter by battle or pretense [of a] law of righteousness for temporal cause or spiritual[,] with out special revelation." Such killing was "contrary to the New Testament," which "most[ly] taught for to love and to have mercy on his enemies, and not for to slay them."<sup>107</sup> Impressed by their uneducated and dangerous potential, Parliament asked the Dominican friar Roger Dymmok (fl. 1370–1400) to respond. Dymmok's greatest horror was that the Lollards had misapplied the SOM, for Jesus had clearly intended (according to Dymmok) his teachings for civilians, not for rulers—for personal behaviour, not for the affairs of state. Citing a Jesus parable (Mt 22; Lk 14) in which a dinner host, enraged at no-shows, used force ("compel") to recruit replacement guests, Dymmok wrote that Jesus just intended to forbid evil mental states and motivations, not actual killing.<sup>108</sup>

105 Netter, *Fasciculi*, 274–329; Wilkins, ed., *Concilia*, 158–67. See Beryl Smalley, *Wyclif and His Followers* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1984), 33.

106 William W. Capes, ed., *Registrum Johannis Trefnant, episcopi herefordensis* (Hereford: Wilson and Philips, 1915), 231–393, esp. 359, 377–78, 394–96.

107 H. S. Cronin, ed., "The Twelve Conclusions of the Lollards," *English Historical Review* 22 (1907): 292–304 (302).

108 Roger Dymmok, *Liber contra XII errores et hereses Lollardorum*, ed. H. S. Cronin (London: Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1921), 237–42, 276–71.

Thus, the first chapter of the history of non-violence in England collapsed. Its most articulate spokesman had recanted, and the authorities had persecuted, refuted, and smothered its last embers. The stage then shifted to central Europe.

## Jan Hus

Fourteenth-century Bohemia, at the heart of the Holy Roman Empire, enjoyed a cultural and religious flowering. The latter took the form of a series of religious reformers, climaxing in Jan Hus, who argued for translating the Bible into vernacular languages, and against indulgences and a variety of Church prerogatives.

For Hus, Jesus acted in certain ways because he wanted his followers to imitate his behaviour. For example, because Jesus swore an oath at Jn 3:11, oaths could not be intrinsically bad; Hus knew of many occasions when we should take oaths, such as when swearing to be truthful or obedient. He recommended oaths of obedience especially for Bohemia's German immigrants, but that would happen only when hell froze over ("when a snake warms itself on ice"). At the same time, Hus could defend a priest, named Nicholas, who had refused to swear an oath on the Bible, since Jesus had warned against swearing. Even Jesus's instructions to his disciples directly inspired Hus's preaching in the first place: Hus identified preaching as the first duty of Jesus's followers.<sup>109</sup>

On the walls of Hus's Bethlehem Chapel hung pairs of instructive images looking with a plain ken at the Jesus of history, not at his divinity but at his actions and teachings, not at this glory but at his humility: a rich pope on a horse paired with impoverished Jesus carrying a cross, a pope crowned by Constantine paired with a Jesus crowned with thorns and fleeing from the crowd keen to king him, the pope getting his feet kissed while Jesus knelt to wash his disciples' feet.<sup>110</sup> These images were probably adapted out of a work by Nicholas of Dresden (see below), tables of authorities pointing out similar thesis-antithesis pairings. Thus, Jesus contrasted with Constantine, Baby Jesus being wrapped

109 Jan Hus, *The Letters of John Hus*, trans. Matthew Spinka (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1972), 67–68, 85; František Palacký, ed., *Documenta mag. Joannis Hus vitam, doctrinam, causam in Constantiensi Concilio actam* (Prague: Tempsky, 1869), 3–4. See Matthew Spinka, *John Hus: A Biography* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1968), 205.

110 There is some confusion in historical sources as to the existence, nature, and authorship of these images. They may have been painted by Nicholas of Dresden. See Thomas Fudge, *Magnificent Ride: The First Reformation in Hussite Bohemia* (Florence: Routledge, 2018), 228–29, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315238531>; František Šmahel, "Instead of Conclusion," in *A Companion to Jan Hus*, ed. František Šmahel (Brill: Leiden, 2015), 370–409 (391), [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004282728\\_013](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004282728_013)

in swaddling clothes contrasted with the pope being crowned, Jesus being whipped contrasted with the pope's calling for the execution of anyone who injured the priesthood.<sup>111</sup> These juxtapositions with papal splendour placed Jesus in a plain-ken light: here, the crown of thorns and the manger were not awesome relics with deep and deep-ken meaning, but merely a torture device and a trough for foddering smelly and drooling livestock.

The humility of Bethlehem's plain-ken Jesus commanded attention. One popular song counselled, "If you want to know the Bible / you must go to Bethlehem / and learn it on the walls / as Master Jan of Husinec preached it." Hus admonished, "if thou wilt not believe it, learn it on the wall in Bethlehem." Even Hus's opponents recognized the importance of the chapel; one complained, "Its pulpit is Hus's triumphal chariot, and the paintings upon the walls are the blazonry of his armour." Queen Sophia of Bavaria (1376–1428), King Wenceslaus IV's (1361–1419) second wife, frequently came to Bethlehem to hear Hus's sermons—and ostentatiously wrote letters to the pope in 1411 to tell him so. She also helped install Hus-influenced preachers in various Church offices around Prague. She eventually, in 1419, had to meet with the outraged papal legate, but somehow avoided any punishment for her support of the controversial preacher.<sup>112</sup>

The Council of Constance (1414–18) declared Hus a heretic following Wycliffe's teachings (which he denied) and burned him at the stake. This radicalized the "Hussite" Bohemian reformation movement and led to a break with both the papacy and the emperor, who combined military forces to bring heretical Bohemia back to obedience.

### Nicholas of Dresden

However radical mainstream Hussite opinion became, they usually had a wing even more radical, especially away from Prague where the movement's leadership could police the movement more closely. One of the radicals in Bohemia after the execution of Hus was Nicholas of Dresden. He had probably studied at Prague, where he was influenced by Wycliffite ideas generally and by Matthias of Janov (d. 1393/94) in particular. References to him as a "master" suggest he had completed academic degrees. As a German he would have been an outsider in Prague, and perhaps he had links to the German Poor, or the Germans of modest means long settled in the countryside of southern Bohemia. He had

111 Howard Kaminsky, *A History of the Hussite Revolution* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1967), 40–49; Fudge, *Magnificent Ride*, 226–28.

112 Jan Hus, *The Church [De ecclesia]*, trans. David S. Schaff (New York: Scribner, 1915), 273. See Fudge, *Magnificent Ride*, 77, 207, 232.

been a moderate radical (ca. 1412–15), close to the Hussite leader Jakoubek of Stříbro (d. 1429) in ideas and friendship, until Nicholas's radicalism radicalized in the fall of 1415. Where Hus and Jakoubek wanted to reform a corrupted Church, Nicholas saw no point in reforming a Church ruled by the Antichrist, and so sought to destroy what was unredeemable. Thus, Nicholas became the first reformer to write from *outside* the Church. In an astonishing mental act of historicism reminiscent of the Poor, but radical even by Bohemian standards, Nicholas removed himself from the Church and from Church tradition entirely. In one work, he referred to an inquisitor as not a doctor of law, but a "doctor of custom and present practice," that is, someone whose beliefs were merely conditioned by plain-ken circumstances. The University of Prague's mainstream radicals forced him into exile, and soon (my best guess is 1417) he was martyred in Meissen.<sup>113</sup>

His radical teachings, explained for a Hussite audience around 1415 in a series of treatises, revolved around three ideas: Christians should not take oaths, Christians should not venerate images, and Christians should *never* kill. When Jakoubek needed the early Church Fathers to prove that killing was acceptable in some circumstances, Nicholas insisted that those Fathers had no authority beyond what they could find in the New Testament. Emphasizing the gap between the two Testaments, Nicholas held that "Truth teaches through itself" that we should love our enemies. In fact, Nicholas identified the Fathers' early acceptance of killing as the "righteousness of old times" that Jesus mentioned in the SOM before presenting his own, new, perfect righteousness: turn the other cheek. Nicholas thus used the SOM to historicize, and used Jesus to develop a sense of plain-ken change which allowed him to distance, and then dismiss, earlier theologians' teachings. Nicholas inserted a parenthetical expression into his retelling of the SOM: two words into "But I say to you: Do not resist evil," appeared his "taking this change (from Old Testament Law) and inviting you to gentleness and to the perfection of love." Nicholas loathed the violent Old Testament-fuelled authorities who "beat their enemies with the retribution of hate," who were "bulls who strike their enemies' bodies with their horns of virtue." Love your enemy meant no death penalty. True Christians were virtuous, suffering, and non-violent—and in the minority.<sup>114</sup>

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113 Nicholas of Dresden, *The Old Color and the New*, ed. Howard Kaminsky (Philadelphia, PA: American Philosophical Society, 1965), 9–10, 17–21; Nicholas of Dresden, *Querite primum regnum Dei*, ed. Jana Nechutová (Brno: Universita J. E. Purkyně, 1967). See Howard Kaminsky, *History*, 204–20; Jan Sedlák, *Mikuláš z Dráždán* (Brno: Benediktinské, 1914); Zeman, "Restitution and Dissent," 12.

114 Nicholas of Dresden, *Querite*, 67, 89–90; Nicholas of Dresden, *Old Color*, 22.

Nicholas's most influential work was his *Tabule* [Charts], lists of authorities contrasting decretals and canon-law commentary with the Bible. A common trope at the time, this format and agenda echoed Wycliffe's *De Christo et suo adversario Antichristo* [On Christ and His Adversary the Antichrist], and in his own sermons Hus had contrasted the pope on a caparisoned horse with Jesus on a humble donkey. Nicholas's version paired the Donation of Constantine with Jesus fleeing an attempt to make him king (Jn 6:15), the legal requirement that forgery of papal letters be punished with life imprisonment with Jesus's instruction from the SOM to "bless those who hate you" (Mt 5:44), and kissing papal feet with Jesus washing his disciples' feet (Jn 13). At some early point it was illustrated, but it is not clear if Nicholas was writing to the images or if the images were later made for his text. In Prague during the 1410s, street processions reenacted such scenes or carried placards of them.<sup>115</sup>

## Petr Chelčický

### *Ethics on the Eve of War*

With Petr Chelčický we find a new kind of pacifism, deeper, more systematic, and more consequential. In southern Bohemia in 1413, he had crossed paths with Hus, whom he respected, but he bitterly opposed as unbiblical Hus's failure to condemn violence and oaths. Wycliffe he revered—he owned Czech translations of Wycliffe—but Chelčický denied the Englishman's vision of a divided, hierarchical society. The Poor Chelčický applauded, but found they stopped just short of truth.<sup>116</sup>

Chelčický took his name from and spent most of his life in Chelčice in southern Bohemia, some 20 km from Hus's Husinec. His origins were obscure. He called himself a peasant but had wealth and freedom enough to interrupt a farmer's life with a sojourn in Prague, the study of Latin, and writing treatises. Later in life, Chelčický met with Bishop Nicholas of Pelhřimov (ca. 1400–52),

115 Petra Multová, "Communicating Texts through Images: Nicholas of Dresden's *Tabule*," in *Public Communication in European Reformation: Artistic and other Media in Central Europe 1380–1620*, ed. Milena Bartlová and Michal Šroněk (Prague: Artefactum, 2007), 27–34 (28–29).

116 Peter Brock, *Political and Social Doctrines of the Unity of Czech Brethren in the Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth Centuries* (The Hague: Mouton, 1957), 36, 56; Petr Kreuz, "Heinrich Kramer/Institoris and the Czech Lands," *e-Rhizome* 1 (2019): 23–59 (34–35), <https://doi.org/10.5507/rh.2019.002>; Enrico C. S. Molnár, "A Study of Peter Chelčický's Life and a Translation from Czech of Part One of His Net of Faith" (BDiv thesis, Pacific School of Religion, 1947), 19–20.



the most important spiritual leader of the Taborites, who had come to visit him at Vodniany, a small county seat near Chelčice, where they cordially argued about the Eucharist while perched on the dike of a pond. Some scholars have thought Chelčický must have been a nobleman to attract the presence of a bishop to the backwaters, but perhaps the bishop was drawn by the nobility of Chelčický's ideas. His Latin was never great: one censor made fun of one of Chelčický's spelling errors—such as *kopyta* for *kapitola* [chapter], which resembled the Czech *kopyto* [hoof]—and called him *doctor kopytarum* [the doctor of the hooves].<sup>117</sup>

In 1419, as papal and imperial forces prepared to move against the Hussites, Chelčický and others from southern Bohemia travelled to Prague to ask the university professors an alarmingly relevant question: if necessary, could Christians attack their enemies? Jakoubek said yes, adding the condition of non-cruelty to the traditional requirements of just cause, right intention, and legal authority. In 1420, as the imperial troops converged on Prague, Chelčický again met with Jakoubek at the Bethlehem Chapel to stress that Jesus forbade resistance. Jakoubek, still in favour of war when just, disappointed Chelčický by being able to provide only “old saints” in his support, rather than New Testament passages. Knights were honourable, and knights killed, Jakoubek explained, so not all killing was dishonourable. Jakoubek called Chelčický a heretic for opposing resistance even when the situation was so dangerous.<sup>118</sup>

Chelčický remembered their second meeting: “After many people had been killed on both sides, Jakoubek excused those who had done the killing,” for he “could not tax their conscience with such things, since otherwise the whole estate of knighthood would stand condemned.” Jakoubek's hypocrisy flabbergasted Chelčický, as the “master would have flown out against anyone who dared eat pork on a Friday, and yet now he cannot make the shedding of blood a matter of conscience.” Chelčický continued,

I say to you that one alone is not able to give chase and kill  
because he has too little strength by himself. But if a nobleman

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117 Henricus Institoris, *Sancte romane ecclesie fidei defensionis clipeum adversus Waldensium* (Olmütz : Baumgarthen, 1502), fol. 4r. See Howard Kaminsky, “Nicholas of Pelhrimov's Tabor: An Adventure into the Eschaton,” in *Eschatologie und Hussitismus*, ed. Alexander Patschovsky and Frantisek Smahel (Prague: Historisches Institut, 1996), 139–67; Molnár, “A Study,” 22; P. J. Šafařík, “Studie o Petru Chelčickém,” *Časopis Musea Království Českého* 48 (1874): 91–109 (92–93). Nicholas of Hereford was also known for a weak command of Latin grammar and pronunciation.

118 Brock, *Political and Social Doctrines*, 32; Molnár, “A Study,” 13–15; Murray L. Wagner, *Petr Chelčický: A Radical Separatist in Hussite Bohemia* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1983), 77.

gathers a great army of peasants and makes of them warriors who can kill someone with the power of the army, they will in no way be [called] murders, neither will it be held against the conscience; but it can be [wrongly] boasted that they make of themselves brave men and heroes by murdering heretics. And this poison is poured out among Christians by doctors who in such matters did not have the counsel of Jesus the meek, but the counsel of the Great Whore, and thus the land is filled with blood and abominations.

Unimpressed and unconvinced, Chelčický withdrew to Chelčice to develop his ideas further. Jakoubek's conscience had been stolen by the Church Fathers.<sup>119</sup>

### Church History

Chelčický's main treatise was the *Sie' viery* [Net of Faith]. As the Council of Basel concluded (last session in May 1443), Chelčický, sorrowful at that show of hypocrisy, was composing this treatise against it. Some fifteen of its ninety-five chapters explicitly denounced the Council. The "net of faith" represented the Christian religion, which had been entered by "two monstrous whales"—the pope and the emperor—that "turn about in the net" and "rent it to such an extent that very little of it has remained intact." The fishes it once had held—the Christian faithful—escaped from the net to their doom.<sup>120</sup>

Chelčický criticized the theologians who provide the justifications for war, by which the Church "abandons the command and discipleship of Christ, bathing herself in blood and returning evil for evil." He especially condemned the use of violence by the state, the secular rulers turned murderers for Jesus. The evils of the state were ancient. The downfall of the Church came with Constantine. The pope should not have accepted his Donation, as Wycliffe had asserted, but instead should have insisted on the emperor's resignation, as no Christian could hold state office, let alone supreme rule. The Pope "rather likes a wicked king," who would "fight for her better than a humble Christian" would. In accepting the Donation, Pope Sylvester "mixed poison with Christ's gospel."<sup>121</sup> Unlike the humanist Lorenzo Valla, whose attack on the Donation appeared only a

119 Wagner, *Petr Chelčický*, 78–79.

120 Chelčický, *The Net of Faith*, 43–146; translated in Molnár, "A Study," 73. The idea that a net, a tool used to murder fish, represented the fish's salvation paralleled Jesus's own metaphorical use of the shepherd, whose professional concern for sheep was limited to preserving them for later exploitation or murder.

121 Chelčický, *Net*, 94–97. See Brock, *Political and Social Doctrines*, 45–46; Wagner, *Petr Chelčický*, 96, 123.

few years earlier, Chelčický accepted the Donation's authenticity, but showed its disastrous consequences: with the Donation, the two whales entered and destroyed the Net of Faith.

What did authority teach? Chelčický presented the teaching of Augustine (354–430), who, he said, "wallows in blood": "When a soldier kills a man while serving under the state of authority, he is not guilty of murder. On the contrary, if he refuses to obey the order to kill, he is guilty of insubordination." Chelčický expressed amazement at Augustine's twisted logic: "So, the soldier is obeying the law when he mercilessly murders people but is a transgressor of the law if he should show mercy! This is what he says, he who is supposedly filled of the Holy Spirit!" Chelčický recounted how Aegidius Carlerius (d. ca. 1472) had employed Augustine and other early theologians at Basel "to justify the right to spill blood by the secular authority," but they have only shown "how much Christendom has been stained by blood through these learned Doctors." He concluded that these sophisticated theologians "are making God as having two mouths, with one saying 'you shall not kill,' and with the other, 'you shall kill.'"<sup>122</sup>

How did history work? Chelčický's understanding of history contrasted dead customs with true foundations: "The straying people do not seek (truth) but only follow dead customs, walking in the (footsteps) of their fathers who have invented the customs; the people are born unto customs just as pagans are born unto idols." Therefore we should "look for the foundation that the apostles had made for the original Christians, in order that they might continue their good works." His plain ken made him keenly aware of the vagaries of history, which he denounced, urging, "let us not follow desire, or custom, or law, or man, and let us not come to terms with this world." Violence was merely custom, a historical accident, like an error entered into the manuscript stream. Developing an extended simile to illustrate our relation to history, Chelčický imagined "the burning out of a house which has fallen down making a pile of ruins: here and there we see by some signs that there stood a chamber before—but everything fell onto the foundation, which, buried, is grown over by a forest where animals graze and dwell." History had buried truth. "Who," he asked, "will then find the buried foundation of the burned house that is in ruins, and which is deeply covered (with debris) and the top of which has long since been overgrown with defiant weeds?" The problem was complicated because foolish people mistake the weeds and debris for the actual foundation, and they, "pulling to themselves the growth on top of the house ruins, declare, 'This is the foundation

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122 Chelčický, *Net*, 124–26, 131.

and the way, all should follow it.' And with many of them we see that their new foundation sinks into soft ground, the floor settling at different levels."<sup>123</sup>

### *Criticisms of Church, State, and Society*

Chelčický discounted Wycliffe's partial defence of war as outside of the Bible, and discounted Jakoubek's as outside the New Testament. The "saints of old" could not suffice: even if St. Peter "himself should suddenly appear from Heaven and begin to advocate the sword and to gather together an army in order to defend the truth and establish God's order by worldly might, even then I would not believe him." He objected to the devil "taking on the guise for blameless lives, virtuous acts, many scriptural texts—both in their lofty meanings and in the simple meanings of the letters alone." The virtuous, blameless theologians have used the Bible to justify their violence. They "milk it violently out of various passages in the Scriptures."<sup>124</sup>

Like Sylvester, the fifteenth-century popes continued to make bad decisions. In particular, in the pope's lust for power he "arrogated to himself all the prerogatives of Christ." This made Jesus redundant, for "of what use is Christ to us, indeed, if the great priest, his vicar, can forgive all our sins and remit all sufferings, sanctify us, and make us just? What more can Jesus add to this?" The pope had created a legal complex, opposed to God, and "behind these laws the people have forgotten the true law of God." In fact, the people "do not even

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123 Chelčický, *Net*, 49, 56, 60; Howard Kaminsky, ed., "Peter Chelčický: Treatises on Christianity and Social Order," *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance* 1 (1964): 105–79 (118). Chelčický also used history, confusingly, as an antidote to scepticism, specifically regarding what Jesus believed: "Whoever harbours any doubt in this matter and says, 'I do not know what He believed or disbelieved,' should use right reasoning: for if it could not be known, nobody could ever have believed. There have been many, however, who have believed the way He desired it; many have been the followers of the faith once given to the saints by its author and perfecter, Jesus Christ." This is odd logic, but Chelčický seemed to believe it. Let us break it down:

1. Many have believed what Christ believed [so, history]
2. Thus, what Christ believed can be known
3. Thus, the doubtful can know what Christ believed

Point 1 assumes the conclusion, and neither 2 nor 3 follow from it. However, from a certain deep-ken perspective, if truth is simple, monistic, and powerful, Chelčický's argument makes sense: If a pond has ripples, the doubtful can imagine a central location where they came from. Jesus' beliefs caused the ripples. See Chelčický, *Net*, 56.

124 Kaminsky, ed., "Chelčický," 121, 154. See Brock, *Political and Social Doctrines*, 59–60; Wagner, *Petr Chelčický*, 76.

suspect that there exists another faith but that which is presented by the laws of the great priest," the pope.<sup>125</sup>

Reports from what was happening at the Council of Basel offered ammunition to expand this critique of the papacy to the Church as a whole: according to Chelčický, the Church's representatives "abolished" Jesus's commandment to take Communion in both kinds. Church authorities "abolished" and "amended" according to their own whims. Moreover, the priests were incompetent, "unable to pray or to serve mass otherwise than by mumbling out of the Books of Hours." The mass was the devil's disguise, for such extravagant rituals, especially music and singing, distracted from true worship. Chelčický used Juan Palomar (fl. 1431–43), the "Master Auditor at Basel," as a ventriloquist's dummy to explain the orthodox perspective: "The original Church was stupid," he had Palomar sneer, "because she worshipped without vestments, without altars, and without church buildings, and knew naught but to say the Lord's Prayer." The "present church," in contrast, "knows how to honour God because she built great and costly cathedrals and altars out of stone, she ordered rich vestments and blessed everything [...] honoured God bountifully with ornamented churches, walls painted and dressed up with tapestries, with lights, bells, and organs, with singing in high voices, plainsong, and melodies with polyphonic notes." God preferred the present Church, "Palomar" continued, "For He yearns so much to be honored: yes. He is sad if there is not enough wax to burn and if the walls do not shine with resplendent colours!"<sup>126</sup>

Chelčický's attack on the Church did not distract him from attacking the state. That the ruler was Christian gave him no special authority: "No one may stray from the way of Christ and follow the emperor with his sword, for this way is not changed just because Caesar has become a Christian." Christianity and dominion were intrinsically incompatible, because authority and cruelty were intrinsically linked: "Authority cannot exist without cruelty. If it ceases to be cruel, it will at once perish of itself, since none will fear it... Therefore, authority is far removed from love." This cruel authority was the opposite of what Jesus taught, for he "forbids his disciples all lordship with its pride and cruelty and compulsion" (Lk 22:26). For Chelčický, the state held authority only over non-Christians, among whom he included those people only nominally Christian.<sup>127</sup>

Chelčický expanded his criticisms from the state to society more broadly. To Chelčický, as with the early Taborites, commerce and its havens—markets,

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125 Chelčický, *Net*, 79–81.

126 *Ibid.*, 69–70, 81; Kaminsky, ed., "Chelčický," 122. See Brock, *Political and Social Doctrines*, 68.

127 Chelčický, *Net*, 102. See Brock, *Political and Social Doctrines*, 46–48; Wagner, *Petr Chelčický*, 51.

fairs, taverns—as well as usury and profit, all stood condemned. Chelčický took up Wycliffe’s social vision—a theory of the clergy, nobility, and peasantry together making up the three parts of Christ’s body—only to denounce it: the nobility and the clergy hold themselves “over the common people so that they can ride the latter at their own pleasure, and even consider themselves thereby better members of the Body of Christ than the common people whom they ride, and whom they subject to themselves not as limbs of their own body but as beasts whom they think nothing of tearing apart.” He thus found Wycliffe’s fundamental society-as-Jesus’s-body metaphor useful, but found in it not harmony but discord: “The crooked limbs that hold down the sword oppress the other, lesser limbs, afflicting them, beating them, putting them into prison, weighing them down with a forced labor, rent and other contrivances, so they go about wan and pale...” He then expanded beyond the metaphor:

If the body of Christ is divided by such an order of things, what inequalities are there present! Naturally, this order is agreeable to the first two classes who loaf, gorge, and dissipate themselves. And the burden for this living is shoved onto the shoulders of the third class, which has to pay in suffering for the pleasures of the other two guzzlers—and there are so many of them! [...] It is these two groups of lazy gluttons who, for their own pleasures, drain the working people of their blood, and tread on them contemptuously as if they were dogs.

Nobles and priests rush to rule like pilgrims on a hot day rush for shade.<sup>128</sup>

### *Turning to Jesus*

In particular, for Chelčický, this Jesus-based anarchism created problems for jurisprudence. Jesus’s teachings made the human legal apparatus redundant, at best superfluous. The SOM specifically disallowed the Christian any recourse to the courts (e.g., Mt 5:40’s “If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also”), and in a Christian society this would shut down the legal system. In a rare concession from Jesus’s teachings, Chelčický admitted that the first Christians did create courts to deal with the imperfections of people necessarily new in their faith, but those were staffed with commoners and so in no way resembled or justified the aristocratic judicial system of Chelčický’s own day. Citing the commandment to love one’s neighbour, as well as the parable

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<sup>128</sup> Chelčický, *Net*, 75; Kaminsky, ed., “Chelčický,” 158–63. See Brock, *Political and Social Doctrines*, 67.

of the wheat and tares, Chelčický paralleled Nicholas of Dresden and many Taborites in condemning capital punishment, but went further in pointing out the total incompatibility of love with punishment that was non-fatal but merely cruel.<sup>129</sup>

Jesus stood at the centre of this social revolution. God announced his birth first to peasants. Because Jesus redeemed mankind with his blood, no serfdom could exist. It was Jesus, not the lords, who had bought the peasants:

And if you who are heavy and round with fat object saying, "Our fathers have bought these people and those manors for our inheritance," then, indeed, they made an evil business and an expensive bargain! For who has the right to buy people, to enslave them and to treat them with indignities as if they were cattle led to slaughter. You prefer dogs to people whom you cuss, despise, beat, from whom you extort taxes, and for whom you forge fetters [...] while at the same time you will say to your dog, "Setter, come here and lie down on the pillow." Those people were God's before you bought them! [...] Christ bought this people to himself—not with silver and gold—but with his own precious blood and terrible suffering. [...] Look, you fat one, what a sodomitic life you have prepared for your people!

The reference to sodomy suggests the peasants' passive victimhood; twenty-first-century English also has a vulgar colloquial expression linking victimhood to sex, "to get screwed over." Chelčický linked this social catastrophe to the Crucifixion, specifically through the image of the Great Whore of Babylon (Rev. 17), "who has taken all the world to mate and has sucked out its fatness through the bleeding side of Christ" and has "spread the pleasures of her fornication in the sign of his painful wounds." A representation of the papacy, she had even "made it her joy to walk in delightful coolness in the shadow of his dolorous suffering; she has used Christ's cross and Christ's faith to prepare an eternal slumber and sleep in hell for the world, soothing the world in her poisons."<sup>130</sup>

Chelčický disapproved of using violent efforts to expand Christianity. He maintained that conversion to Christianity could not be forced and compared such efforts to priests ordering an old woman to give birth, or to learning Czech by studying German. A ruler forcefully encouraging Christianity turned himself into a sinner, without creating any new Christians.<sup>131</sup> (See Chapter 7.)

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129 Brock, *Political and Social Doctrines*, 44, 52–55.

130 Chelčický, *Net*, 105; Kaminsky, ed., "Chelčický," 161. See Brock, *Political and Social Doctrines*, 64.

131 Brock, *Political and Social Doctrines*, 47–51.

Chelčický concluded his social examination by looking ahead to the Last Judgment, when Jesus would say to the social elites, “As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me. Go to hell!” On that day, “no high titles, no archives, no records, no documents with seals [...] will save you from perdition.”<sup>132</sup>

In an extended treatment, Chelčický brought together all of these threads and propelled his argument into new terrain: the nobility, he says, “are all Christian and at least some of them have, on account of faith, a bad conscience when they kill, do violence to others, and rob them of their property. But (on the whole) they do not hold these things to be sinful.” Nobles fight “for worldly honour, and if someone touches their property, immediately they declare war, round up the people like cattle, and drive them to war where all murder and rob one another. How can it not be dangerous, therefore, for good Christians to live under such powers, which force them to do evil and to trespass the divine commandments!” It is better “to be willing to be killed by his overlord rather than to commit such an evil thing.”<sup>133</sup> Non-violence and suffering necessarily involved each other, for it was better to be killed than to kill.

Although Chelčický was annoyed by people who considered Jesus-based law as too “impractical,” his Christian society was profoundly at odds with the world. His good Christian would not fare well: “Only a fool will come after Christ and be ridiculed by all and sundry.” Still, the state’s oppression did not license armed rebellion. There was no solution; indeed, there was no reason to seek a solution—the rulers oppressed, and the ruled suffered. The problem was not the suffering, but that society linked Jesus to the oppression rather than to the suffering. The solution would wait until Jesus, no longer long-suffering and peaceable, would return to crush the oppressive, cruel rulers. There was a place for violence, but it belonged to the future and to Jesus.<sup>134</sup>

Chelčický was after Truth, not after a workable solution. He noted that the execution of Hus showed not only that the Council of Constance authorities had no interest in Truth but also that the state maintained a bottom-line monopoly on learning. How did Chelčický think to get at Truth?

Distinguishing between the divine and the historical, Chelčický historicized the Bible: Although we must obey scripture, “not everything in the Scripture is divine... Some portions do not lead us to follow Christ for [they] were written by some only as an [historical] record, and they were never [intended] to have a power.” As an example, he mentioned Jesus’s curing lepers and telling “them to

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132 Chelčický, *Net*, 105.

133 *Ibid.*, 90.

134 *Ibid.*, 87–88, 133; Chelčický, *Postilla*, ed. Emil Smetánka, 2 vols. (Prague: n.p., 1900), I, 20. See Brock, *Political and Social Doctrines*, 47–48, 65.



go and to show themselves to the priests and to offer gift in accordance with the Law of Moses.” Here, Chelčický stood against so many previous scholars urging the imitation of Jesus: despite Jesus taking this action, there was no expectation that his followers would subsequently cure lepers and send them to offer gifts: “This was written as an [historic] act of the power of Jesus and of a custom of the priests of the Old Testament, but not for an imitation by coming generations of Christians.” The key was discerning Jesus’s intention:

Even though faith is founded on every word of God, it is valid for us Christians only if it agrees with the original intent of Christ. For the Jewish law has an insufficiency (when judged by) the law of Christ since it observes material sacrifices and other physical requirements that the old law showed them in material parables. And as these parables foreshadowed Christ, they become true in Christ.<sup>135</sup>

Chelčický’s teachings consistently emphasized non-violence. His opponents admitted the undesirability of war; Jakoubek had demanded that soldiers fight “with great love toward God” and that “every brutality, every avaricious excess, and every other irregularity be excluded.” Chelčický, however, taught that so long as war was allowed for any reason, his opponents were wrong. Their prayers for victory were “a terrible blasphemy,” and the soldiers defending the Hussites, soldiers to whom they gave, outrageously, the Eucharist, were “murderers and robbers.”<sup>136</sup> Jean Petit (ca. 1360–1411) (see Chapter 11) and Chelčický both followed a plain-ken road to opposite conclusions. Petit understood law with the plain ken, in that it recognized exceptions in different times, places, and circumstances. There were special, psychological, circumstances in spacetime that excused or required a murder. Chelčický thought that Jesus was teaching a law that worked as an actual ethical teaching that we must obey in human spacetime. Both men opposed any deep-ken idea that we could participate in some awesome thing Jesus had said regardless of the “literal” content of his saying or of our behaviour in human spacetime—and all the more opposed an extreme deep-ken mentality that would just admire the no-kill rule, perhaps by counting the number of letters in it, reciting it in the appropriate part of the liturgy, or listening to it at mass while torturing prisoners. Both thinkers looked at all the multitudes of possible spacetime circumstances; Petit saw one that allowed murder, but Chelčický did not.

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<sup>135</sup> Chelčický, *Net*, 55, 107. See Brock, *Political and Social Doctrines*, 68.

<sup>136</sup> Brock, *Political and Social Doctrines*, 60; Wagner, *Petr Chelčický*, 77.

## Luke of Prague and the Broken Unity of Brethren

By the 1430s, the long wars had made the Hussites, especially the lower social classes, increasingly receptive to Chelčický's teachings. By the 1450s, their Archbishop-elect Jan Rokycana (d. 1471) used Chelčický in his own attack on war. Brother Řehoř (Gregor), often considered one of the main founders of the Unity of Brethren, the enduring radical branch of the Hussites, met with an aging Chelčický in the 1450s, and by 1461 could agree that the state was "not entitled to use force in matters of faith, but they should also refrain from defending the faith by the sword. For Christ sent out his apostles into the world to preach the Gospel without the help of civil power, of magistrates, of hangmen or of armies." As a result, Chelčický had an early influence on the Unity.<sup>137</sup>

By the end of the century, however, even that Unity of Brethren was tiring of peace. In his youth, Luke of Prague had read Chelčický, which attracted him to the Unity of Brethren, in which he took up a leadership position just as it was disunifying into two branches. Luke went with the majority, less strict "Major" branch. The Major Party denied that the New Testament justified perfectionism and dismissed the Minor Party as perfectionists. Vavřinec Krasonický (1460–1532), attacking the Minor Party, said Jesus "is not the creator of new commandments, but refers back to the old. [...] Christ never said or intended that another Christian righteousness be contained in these injunctions" of the SOM. Jesus never wanted, Krasonický continued, "that Christian righteousness should be higher than the Jewish in these moral commandments, which are ever pure in themselves, for the will of God is eternal." This was essentially the deep ken, rejecting the break between Old and New Testaments, and not allowing any historical Jesus to develop upon previous commandments.<sup>138</sup>

During meetings at Brandýs nad Orlicí (1490) and Rychnov (1494), the new Brethren watered down the old ideas. Wars, oaths, and magistrates were bad, but if you could not avoid them then you could accept them as long as you did nothing specifically "against God." Return to the particularizing rules that Chelčický had argued against, the latter meeting concluded helplessly, "We cannot give uniform instruction and teaching how one should conduct oneself [in such cases], on account of the divergence of cause, place, time, and persons." At Rychnov, Luke had Chelčický's writings condemned and became committed to a mainstream Christianity. Traces of pacifism vexed Luke, as when the Minors

137 Brock, *Political and Social Doctrines*, 39–41, 89.

138 *Ibid.*, 183; C. Daniel Crews, "Luke of Prague: Theologian of the Unity," *Journal of Moravian History* 18 (2018): 1–46, <https://doi.org/10.5325/jmorahist.18.1.0001>; Edmund de Schweinitz, trans., *The Catechism of the Bohemian Brethren* (Bethlehem: Clauder, 1869).

ostentatiously carried wooden weapons to proclaim their nonviolence—“vain Pharisees wandering around with staffs, who display their righteousness.” Luke denounced the Minor Party for their hypocrisy in denouncing violence but not denouncing the protection they drew from it. Society needed violence for stability. If the Minor Party’s adherents truly thought Christians could not use violence, then, Luke held, the unavoidable social need for violence would force them to live with non-Christians, who would be allowed to use violence freely. There were ways to use violence well, Luke argued, for even execution or torture was acceptable when carried out by executioners and torturers with love in their hearts. Chelčický had lost his authority because of his “immoderately lofty” attitude.<sup>139</sup> He died in obscurity. We do not know the year, or even the decade, of his death.

The Major branch of the Unity desperately wanted to reestablish the authority-chain of apostolic succession, and the connection with the past that came with it. Luke sought the salvation of a shattered chronology: if Rome had broken its link to a reliable past, the Unity hoped to save history by exploring geography—they sent out ambassadors to search widely for an uncorrupted apostolic Church, primitive Christians who could clear up obscure passages of scripture. Luke travelled via Kraków and Lviv with three companions to Constantinople in 1491, and there they split up. Luke went to Greece and Wallachia to investigate Orthodox Christianity, but was not impressed with what he perceived as a certain selfishness, or self-centeredness, in monastic asceticism, as Jesus had preached sacrifice of self for others. One of his companions went to Russia, another to Egypt with the intention of reaching India, and the third into the Ottoman Balkans. None found what they had sought, and the Unity would have to rely on the Holy Spirit alone to interpret the Bible.<sup>140</sup>

At Constantinople, Luke appreciated the Muslims’ morality and tolerance, relative to the Catholics’. He converted a Jew fleeing Reconquest Spain, who died en route to Bohemia.

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139 Brock, *Political and Social Doctrines*, 128, 161, 254; Leonard Verduin, *The Reformers and their Stepchildren* (Paris, AR: Baptist Standard Bearer, 2000), 63–94

140 Jan Blahoslav, “Summa quaedam brevissima collecta...,” in *Quellen und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der Böhmischesen brüder*, ed. Jaroslav Goll, 2 vols. (Prague: J. Otto, 1878–82), I, 123; Joachim Camerarius, *Historica Narratio de Fratrum Orthodoxorum Ecclesiis in Bohemia, Moravia, et Polonia* (Heidelberg: Voegelin, 1605), 119–21; John Amos Comenius, *Historia fratrum Bohemorum* (Halle: Orphanotrophius, 1702), 20; Andreas Wengerscius, *Systema Historico-Chronologicum ecclesiarum Slavonicarum*, 2 vols. (Utrecht: Waesberge, bibliopolae, 1652), I, 36–37. See Antonín Gindely, *Geschichte der böhmischen Brüder*, 2 vols. (Prague: Friedrich Tempsky, 1868), I, 67–69; Amedeo Molnár, “Luc de Prague à Constantinople,” *Communio Viatorum* 4 (1961): 192–201.

In 1497–98, Luke travelled through Italy, to investigate reports of the pagan facet of humanism. He visited Rome, Bologna, and Florence, where he witnessed Savonarola's execution. He met with the Waldensian Poor in Fabriano, north of Assisi, but was not impressed with their worldliness, or with the moneychangers in Roman churches. By this time, the Poor in the Cottian Alps near Paesana had established links to the Bohemian Hussites, abandoned pacifism, and sent colonists to Apulia and Calabria. By 1510, they were looking to a Bohemian king to come liberate them and "destroy the churches; kill all the priests."<sup>141</sup>

An early-sixteenth-century Major Unity decree advised that members should avoid war, but if they could not, they should at least avoid active combat roles by getting assigned to guard duty—and if even that were impossible, they should at least avoid the bravery and cruelty that comes from a lust for glory. This retreat was tied to an increased sophistication—sensitivity to attitude and historical context—perhaps due to the increased number of city dwellers and university educated among the Unity, which, by the century's end, numbered around 10,000. Chelčický's pacifism was essentially a dead letter, and would have no influence for the rest of the period.<sup>142</sup>

## Erasmus

Erasmus wrote two treatises that focused on questions of peace and war: *Dulce bellum inexpertis* [War is Sweet to the Inexperienced] (1515) and *Querela pacis* [Peace's Grievance] (1517). While we tend to see peace as an absence of war, Erasmus saw war as a privation of peace. Like many we have seen above, Erasmus wrote for an audience that did not reflexively understand peace as an obvious good. He marvelled that "war is now such an accepted thing that people are astonished to find anyone who does not like it, and such a respectable thing that it is wicked and, I might almost say, 'heretical' to disapprove of this." Like Thomas Brinton, Erasmus used the Bible to support peace by citing the angels' "Peace on Earth" cry at the Nativity.<sup>143</sup>

141 Jean Gonnet and Amedeo Molnár, *Les Vaudois au Moyen Âge* (Torino: Claudiana, 1974), 276–81; Amedeo Molnár, "Les vaudois et l'Unité des Frères tchèques," *Bollettino della Società di Studi Valdesi* 118 (1965): 6–9; Amedeo Molnár, "Luc de Prague et les Vaudois d'Italie," *Bollettino della Società di Studi Valdesi* 90 (1949): 40–64.

142 Brock, *Political and Social Doctrines*, 103, 218–19.

143 Erasmus, "Complaint of Peace," in *Literary and Educational Writings*, trans. Betty Radice, CWE 27, 300; Erasmus, "Dulce bellum inexpertis," in *Adages Volume 6, III iv 1 to IV ii 100*, trans. Denis L. Drysdall, ed. John N. Grant, CWE 35, 401, 417. See especially Hilmar M. Pabel, "The Prince of Peace: Erasmus's Conception of Jesus," in *The Unbounded Community*, ed. William Caferro, Duncan G. Fisher, and

In general, Erasmus took a moderate position on war, one that changed its emphases as he lived and as the contemporary context evolved. A ruler might wage war to maintain order, but not to advance his own agenda. He was initially (1515) cautious about crusades against the Muslims, for “the kingdom of Christ was created, spread, and secured by very different means.” War was “alien to Christ” and “so monstrous that it befits wild beasts rather than men.” Like Chelčický, Erasmus was specifically pained by the presence of the Eucharist, the cross, and the Lord’s Prayer in the military camps of Christians. Relying on the Bible and ancient scholarship, he argued that even wars classified as just should be fought in ways to moderate their unintended consequences. He would grant that “in some cases” not warring against the Turks was a “betrayal of Christendom,” but such crusades should be fought well, “to conduct an armed campaign in such a way that they will be glad to be defeated.”<sup>144</sup>

While Erasmus was addressing contemporary social and political circumstances, the main thrust of his writings on war sought a deep spiritual peace, grounded in Jesus, not merely a political peace. He explained:

on earth nothing else is to be wished for but the peace that takes away sins and reconciles us to God, the peace that cements us together in mutual love. For such peace is not the world’s but God’s peace that passes all understanding and outweighs all the world’s blessings. It is offered freely through the mediator of God and men, not by the intervention of our merits but from the loving-kindness well disposed towards us on God’s part, who

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Jaroslav Pelikan (New York: Garland, 1996), 128–33. See also Fred Dallmayr, “A War Against the Turks? Erasmus on War and Peace,” *Asian Journal of Social Science* 34 (2006): 67–85; Ronald G. Musto, “Just Wars and Evil Empires: Erasmus and the Turks,” in *Renaissance Society and Culture: Essays in Honor of Eugene F. Rice, Jr.*, ed. John Monfasani and Ronald G. Musto (New York: Ithaca Press: 1991), 197–216; John C. Olin, “The Pacifism of Erasmus,” *Thought* 50 (1975): 418–31; Hilmar M. Pabel, “The Peaceful People of Christ: The Irenic Ecclesiology of Erasmus of Rotterdam,” in *Erasmus’ Vision of the Church*, ed. Hilmar M. Pabel and Erika Rummel (Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal, 1995), 57–93; Nathan Ron, “The Christian Peace of Erasmus,” *The European Legacy* 19 (2014): 27–42, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10848770.2013.859793>

144 Erasmus, “Complaint,” 309–11; Erasmus, “Erasmus to Francis I, December 1, 1523,” in *The Correspondence of Erasmus. Volume 10, Letters 1356 to 1534, 1523 to 1524*, trans. R. A. B. Mynors and Alexander Dalzell (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 113–26; Erasmus, “The Education of a Christian Prince,” in *Literary and Educational Writings*, trans. Radice, CWE 27, 286–87; Erasmus, “Praise of Folly,” in *Literary and Educational Writings*, trans. Radice, CWE 27, 139; Erasmus, “On the Turkish War,” in *Expositions of the Psalms*, ed. Dominic Baker-Smith, CWE 64, 232, 265. See Ronald H. Bainton, “The Querela Pacis of Erasmus, Classical and Christian Sources,” *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 42 (1951): 32–48.

thought it best to see to the salvation of the human race in this amazing fashion.<sup>145</sup>

Like others we have considered, Erasmus found a justification for peace both in the life of Jesus, and in specific passages from the New Testament: "Survey the life of Christ from start to finish," he tells us, "and what else is it but a lesson in concord and mutual love?" He wondered, "Why do we drag Christ into this when he would be more at home in any brothel than in a war?" In fact, "the sum and substance of our religion is peace and concord." Erasmus argued that the parable of the tares (Mt 13:24–43), which were to be tolerated, not destroyed, showed the obligation to tolerate those who commit religious error. Erasmus pointed to the SOM's beatitudes, and invited his audience to "search the whole of his teaching; nowhere will you find anything that does not breathe peace." That peace, and love, required us to "declare" Jesus, "not by wearing his name and badge," but by effecting his teachings "in our deeds and lives." Jesus was the model "in whom alone are all the patterns of the holy life."<sup>146</sup>

At times, Erasmus could make deep-ken arguments for peace. He saw dissonance in two Christian armies, each under the cross, in battle with each other. Similarly he identified a contradiction between the weakness of the human body—God gave humans neither claws nor tusks—and our species' ferocity.<sup>147</sup>

More striking in Erasmus's approach to peace, and to his ethics more generally, is his plain-ken fracturing of time and emphasis on changing times creating different obligations. He could use the historical context of a teaching to liberalize it: "Let us examine when, to whom, on what occasion it was said, and perhaps we will discover the true and authentic [*germanam*] meaning." When discussing peace, Erasmus spoke of the "great difference" between the Old Testament God and the New Testament God, who was merely "by his very nature" the same God. God had given permission for the Old Testament Jews to wage war, but Jesus's teachings consistently opposed war. He was equally sensitive to the difference between Jesus's time and his own. New circumstances meant new laws, and these "seem to fight with Christ's decrees unless we reduce

145 Erasmus, *Paraphrase on Luke 1 to 10*, trans. Jane E. Phillips, CWE 47, 74.

146 Erasmus, "Complaint," 299; Erasmus, "Dulce," 412–17, 438; Erasmus, "Erasmus to Jean de Carondelet, January 5, 1523," in *The Correspondence of Erasmus: Letters 1252 to 1355, 1522 to 1523*, trans. R. A. B. Mynors, CWE 9, 252; Erasmus, *Paraphrase on Matthew*, trans. Dean Simpson, CWE 45, 217–18; Erasmus, "The Handbook of the Christian Soldier," trans. Charles Fantazzi, in *Spiritualia*, ed. John W. O'Malley, CWE 66, 1–127 (86).

147 Erasmus, "Dulce," 401–02, 411.

the scriptures into concord, in accordance with the differences among different times.” The New Testament historical and cultural context was crucial.<sup>148</sup>

Erasmus used the plain ken to attenuate Gospel teachings. Consider Erasmus’s understanding of Jesus’s understanding of adultery. The SOM, taken literally, made it difficult for a husband to divorce his wife: a divorce was only permitted if she had been adulterous. However, Erasmus argued that this should be liberalized, for two reasons, referring to the human customs (plain-ken) of the first and of the sixteenth centuries. In the latter, oath-swearing in general was widely practised.<sup>149</sup> Therefore Jesus’s “don’t swear” rule must only refer to swearing recklessly. Therefore, the adultery rule could be liberalized too. Chelčický would have disdained such moderating logic: X was common, so X was (mostly) allowed, so Y was (mostly) allowed. Erasmus allowed liberalization of Jesus’s commandment if it contradicted his sense of fairness, of the dictates of natural law. Because it was unfair to be stuck in a marriage with a criminal spouse, Jesus’s strict requirements could be broadened.

Erasmus emphasized the alienating distance of first-century customs. In his own day, people would not abandon their family, give away their possessions, or castrate themselves. Considering the context clarified that Jesus’s emphasis on chastity was only intended for eunuchs. Therefore, Jesus’s life and teachings could not be required of humans today. Laws and people had only the weakest link to his requirements, because times had changed. The present times were like a “pool of muddy water” that only imperfectly reflected the Gospel’s light.<sup>150</sup> Erasmus thus took an alternative approach to the break between the New Testament and contemporary times. Instead of arguing that his own time had abandoned first-century standards, he argued that they no longer applied,

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148 Erasmus, “In epistolam ad Corinthios priorem annotationes,” in *Opera omnia Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami, Ordinis sexti tomus octavus* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2003), 160; Erasmus, “Complaint,” 299–300; Erasmus, “Education,” 286; Erasmus, “Ratio seu methodus compendio perveniendi ad veram theologiam [1519],” in *Ausgewählte Werke*, ed. Annemarie and Hajo Holborn (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1964), 201. See Christine Christ-von Wedel, *Erasmus of Rotterdam: Advocate of a New Christianity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 210–16, 213–14, 225–28, <https://doi.org/10.3138/9781442665712>

149 However, Erasmus noted on Mt 5:33–37 that “in matters of faith and piety even Christ and the apostles swear.” That is, the laxity of his own century even occurred in Jesus’s. Erasmus, “Annotations,” in *Opera Omnia*, ed. Jean Leclerc, 10 vols. (Leiden: Lugduni Batavorum Vander 1703–06), VI, col. 29.

150 Erasmus, “Ratio,” 200–04. See Christ-von Wedel, *Erasmus of Rotterdam*, 211. Building on Erasmus’s liberalization of the SOM, Claudius Cantiuncula argued that the many inoffensive contradictions he saw in scripture allowed that human weakness on earth justified a “moderation” of Jesus’s law. Claudius Cantiuncula, “Oratio apologetica, in Iuris civilis patrocinium,” in *Lexicon juris civilis*, ed. Jakob Spiegel (Lyons: Gryphius, 1549), 743.

echoing earlier ethicists' assertions that the Old Testament's authority had ended with the New.

## Envoi

This period saw two major ethics-related shifts from the deep ken to the plain: from a time-transcending history to one that fractured in the first century (and bent once or twice after that), and from an ethics based on consonance to a constructed, articulated ethics.

Of course, deep-ken impulses resisted this change. More mainstream scholars objected that, because readers' attitudes conditioned texts' meanings, Chelčický's arrogance undermined his conclusions. Krasonický insisted that Jesus never intended to update Jewish law—he never intended a break between the Old and New Testaments—but even this was undermined by Krasonický's plain-ken interest in Jesus's intentions. Even when the New Testament was read with the deep ken (e.g., the Bible does not often mention Jesus eating meat, so he did not often eat meat), the awareness of historical, ephemeral, human customs could be understood to colour Jesus's behaviour (e.g., Jesus's vegetarianism was limited by the first-century Near West diet).

The decades around 1400 saw an onslaught of peace. The idea of Jesus preaching peace was a big deal, and to enter the period's mentality we have to consider it odd that one should follow his peace-teachings generally in society, and odd that one would expect peace to directly end war.

That Jesus taught ethics, and we should follow those teachings, was the main result of this plain-ken revolution. More than in our earlier discussions of canon interpretation and visual arts, this chapter is about various deep-ken and various plain-ken approaches to peace and ethics, rather than a singular trajectory. In some people, in some attitudes, the two kens overlapped. Ethics encoded in history speaks to both—the deep ken looking for subtle meaning, the plain looking at historical action. A historical being can proclaim eternal laws, and an eternal law can proclaim that everything changes. The plain ken might focus on Jesus as a historical being, and then the deep ken urges consonance with that historical being's life and deeds. The deep ken understood Jesus's life as defining morality, and the plain ken saw his teachings as explaining morality. When Jesus taught by example, he might have spoken to both kens.

By the 1520s, Claudius Cantiuncula (1490–1560), Law Professor at Basel, was complaining that students avoided his lectures, for contemporary “laws are



prophane and in conflict with the Gospel.”<sup>151</sup> In 1518, a young Martin Luther asserted that, in contrast to human law, what Jesus taught was divine law.<sup>152</sup>

Nicholas of Hereford outlived his pacifism, and Nicholas of Dresden’s pacifism swept him to his death. Only with Chelčický do we get a committed and explicit Jesus-Pacifist whose cry commanded the attention (though rarely the assent) of his peers and reached all the way into nineteenth-century Russia, into Tolstoy’s perked and waiting ears—an encounter which would set in motion a process leading to Gandhi, Abdul Gaffar Khan, Martin Luther King, Jr., and beyond.

Over the last three chapters, we have seen deep-ken imitation creating consonance, a simultaneous consonance, between Jesus and the imitator. Jesus never taught people to strip naked and whip themselves, but enthusiasts did so to consonate with his torture before the Crucifixion. The English King Richard II could consonate with Jesus by having his deputy wash the feet of the poor; the deputy consonated with both the king and Jesus, like a note consonates with those an octave higher and lower. Gambling was a sin because rolling dice might produce a five, which consonates hideously with the number of Jesus’s wounds. War was caused by God punishing you for your sinful anger. The modesty of Jesus’s humble birth has a deep meaning which dissonates with displaying your genitals through your hose.

On the other hand, plain-ken imitation is about *following*, subsequently in time, centuries later, Jesus’s actions and teachings. The plain-ken revolution broke apart the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the now, with Jesus’s teachings in the New Testament taking on more powerful significance. Now the moral intention of the teachings became important. Viewed with the plain ken, Richard II followed none of Jesus’s humility by ordering someone else to wash filthy feet. Paying more attention to human psychology, Italian municipal authorities re-categorized naked self-whipping, from pious demonstration to sexual deviance. Gambling was a sin because it could create a psychological addiction and disrupt your family life. War was caused by your anger sparking a chain of escalating conflicts.

For the deep ken, we should consonate with Jesus—exist simultaneously with a timeless Jesus. For the plain ken, we should follow after Jesus, using his first-century model as an exemplar for our twenty-first-century lives.

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151 Claudius Cantiuncula, “Oratio apologetica,” 737.

152 Martin Luther, “Resolutiones disputationum de indulgentiarum virtute (1518),” in Martin Luther, *Werke*, 120 vols. (Weimar: Hermann Böhlhaus Nachfolger, 1833), I, 533.

## 22. Afterword: History between the Kens

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On Easter Sunday, 1517, in northwest Switzerland, a preacher interrupted his sermon to recline in a pile of manure, hiss like a goose, and then act out giving birth to a calf. Another Easter sermon climaxed in the preacher eating pancakes while imitating a cuckoo bird. Another discussed a hypothetical reality in which the Jews did not persecute Jesus, and so Mary had to crucify him herself. Reports of these unexpected sermons eventually reached Basel and its in-house preacher Johannes Oecolampadius (d. 1531), a sober man who had helped Desiderius Erasmus (1466–1536) publish his Greek New Testament the year before. He was flummoxed. At a loss, he tried to apply a deep-ken understanding: there were subtle connections between pancakes, manure, and some profound allegorical truth. His friends, laughing over dinner one night, blocked his attempt and turned towards a plain ken: these were just people, delighting in Jesus's Resurrection, having fun. Oecolampadius could not let it go; he could not hear this calving preacher with a plain ken: if his friends' laughter denied him a deep ken focused on meaning, he would hear with a deep ken focused on decorum, and be outraged at the dissonance between such "shameless stupidities" and the dignity of Easter. The next year, he published *De risu paschali* [On Easter Laughter], urging his readers to imitate Jesus and find meaning in the silences of canon: "No one knows that Jesus laughed, but every one knows that he wept."<sup>1</sup>

This book has showcased dozens of fifteenth-century humans thinking with either or both kens. As a professional historian, my native ken is plain. I read

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1 *De Risu Paschali* (Basel: Johann Froben, 1518). See Maria Caterina Jacobelli, *Ostergelächter: Sexualität und Lust im Raum des Heiligen* (Regensburg: Pustet, 1992); Anton Linsenmayer, *Geschichte der Predigt in Deutschland* (Munich: Stahl, 1886), 180–82; Jolanta Rzegocka, "Being Serious about Laughter: The Case of Early Modern Biblical Plays," in *Humour and Religion: Challenges and Ambiguities*, ed. Hans Geybels and Walter Van Herck (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), 156–68; Benny Grey Schuster, *Das Osterlachen*, trans. Eberhard Harbsmeier (Hamburg: Igel, 2019).

the sources with the plain ken as best I could, but when that failed, I artificially read with a deep ken, as best I could. I imagine the typical reader will also have brought an instinctive plain ken, and the ideal readers will, in certain passages, try to use the deep ken as sympathetically as they can.

How we use kens determines who we are, which in turn conditions how we use kens. To me, Alex Colville's 1978 painting *Dog and Priest* (see Fig. 22.1), in which a dog blocks the face of a reclining priest, has the awkward staging of plain-ken art: the dog is "in the way," obscuring the human's face. Instead, a canine observer might find deep-ken appropriateness in highlighting the priest's pet-giving hands.



Fig. 22.1 Alex Colville, *Dog and Priest* (1978), acrylic on hardboard, © A.C.Fine Art. All rights reserved, [http://alexcolville.ca/gallery/alex\\_colville\\_1978\\_dog\\_and\\_priest/](http://alexcolville.ca/gallery/alex_colville_1978_dog_and_priest/)

One modern proverb neatly encapsulates the plain-ken attitude: if something sounds too good to be true... it probably is. A variation, sometimes attributed to comedian Emo Philips, neatly encapsulates the process of switching kens, even in a mid-sentence twist: if something sounds too good to be true... it's probably magic. Magic and miracles create opportunities for opening the mind and finding the logic in phenomena dismissed by the plain ken.

The Komi sorcerer Pam of Perm (see Chapter 7) tied success in hunting bears to the superiority of Indigenous religion over Christianity. This makes sense: Indigenous non-human powers helped the hunters. To test Pam's claim, a "scientist" (at least one who could overcome any conditioned prejudice to dismiss the issue out of hand) might set up a "scientific" experiment comparing the bear-hunting abilities of one hundred Komi against those of one hundred Christians. However, that all presumes that spiritual beings enjoy participation in experiments, and would behave normally, or at least be not so annoyed that

they change their habits. This experiment would be unlikely to yield results that give the scientist much confidence.

Consider an under-verified legend about the sanctuary of Maria dell'Isola at Tropea in southern Italy. In the eighth century, during a period of iconoclasm, a previously unknown statue of Mary was discovered. The bishop, considering the statue too large for the natural cave he wanted to display it in, decided to have its legs sawn off—and instantly died. My father pointed out that if the next bishop were scientific, he would have tried again. Of course, the next bishop was neither brave nor impious enough to proceed with the investigation along such scientific lines.

In early drafts, I, fighting all my training, my instincts, and centuries of western intellectual tradition, experimented with writing this history with and for a deep ken. Over the years, advance readers convinced me to remove almost all such passages; their native plain ken was too strong, and my artificial deep ken was too weak.

One paragraph written with a deep-ken voice survived the first readers' feedback. It justified calling the long fifteenth century the "Nicodemian Age," after the statistically improbable—to the plain ken—number of the "priests, scholars, potentates, and mystics named Nick who played roles, starring or supportive, in the Jesus cult's history in this period: Nicholas of Autrecourt, Nicole Oresme, Nicholas Love, Nicholas of Dresden, Pope Nicholas V, Nicholas of Hereford, Nicholas of Lyra, Nicholas Eymereich, Nikephoros of Calabria, [Ni-]Colette of Corbie, the non-swearing Nicholas of Prague, Nicholas Martello of Bologna, Niccolò Malermi, Nicolas Jenson, Nicolaus de Random, Nicholas of Pisek, Nicodemus of Tismana, Niccolò de' Conti, Gonfaloniere Niccolò Capponi, and Niccolò Machiavelli."

Eventually, even this paragraph disappeared in the face of my, and early readers', discomfort with the deep ken. Deep-ken writing is incompatible with historical satisfaction and with scholarly monographs. Instead, I want to crunch census data to create statistically significant datasets of names, and, even then, with those results I would not argue for any cosmic significance. As a good historian, I cut the paragraph (and then smuggled it back in here anyway, safely contained in quotation marks).

Such plain-ken assumptions permeate the historical profession, and are perhaps most visible in ancient history, where the relative paucity of written sources encourages historians to make judgment calls based, sometimes, on a single passage. A handbook of Indian epigraphy raises "suspicions as to the historicity" of a list of sixty-four different writing systems because the number

sixty-four is “conventional.”<sup>2</sup> One scholar of the Old Testament commented that King Solomon’s narrative was similar to royal narratives from other parts of southwest Asia, and was therefore unlikely to have been historical. The implication is that a story from Persia, or elsewhere, had made its way to the editors of the Old Testament, who applied it to Solomon.<sup>3</sup> A source clocking the population of Nanchang in 1412 at 1,126,119 is ugly enough to be believable, until compared with a record of Nanchang’s population eighty years later, also at 1,126,119; the coincidence makes at least one of the two figures dubious.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, one study, after presenting traditions that the Buddha died either 100 years or 218 years before the rule of Ashoka, notes that the number 100 was “suspiciously round.”<sup>5</sup> I suspect most historians, even in total ignorance of Buddhist history, would have more confidence in 218, as our plain ken would guide us. I can artificially engineer a deep-ken perspective: the Buddha, perfectly enlightened, teacher of gods and humans, would not link his death to an ugly number (see Appendix C, Example 5).

Jesus did not invent plain-ken history writing, but his cult created problems and solutions that contributed to its rise. The plain ken came late to the Far West, but took over and settled in for the duration; indeed, professional historians are still living by its house rules. Most modern historians now believe the world is flat. That is, their plain ken sees a meaningless world that lacks the depth that a deep ken would detect. Most professional historians today ignore or reject the deep ken in their work. For most, the idea of a deep ken would probably give rise to aversion. It looks, to us, stupid or silly; it finds significance in what is obviously coincidence.<sup>6</sup> The plain ken, with its meaningless events in homogeneous spacetime, is fundamental to our logic as historians. Coincidence, which flowers with the beauty of consonance in deep-ken eyes, is meaningless or suspicious to us.

One modern biographer of Jesus wrote that what historians are most confident about is their knowledge that Jesus was wrong. In the gospel account,

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2 Richard Salomon, *Indian Epigraphy* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998), 9.

3 J. Maxwell Miller and John H. Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press 2006), 193–94.

4 Timothy Brook, *The Confusions of Pleasure: Commerce and Culture in Ming China* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), 95.

5 Paul Williams, *Buddhist Thought* (London: Routledge, 2000), 23.

6 Olivier Hekster notes that historians’ work often “excludes ‘coincidence’ as a mode of interpretation. Most historians view coincidences as closely related events that lack causal relationship. That type of coincidence does not fit into a historical narrative, because historians tend to focus on causality, action, and consequence.” Olivier Hekster, “The Size of History: Coincidence, Counterfactuals and Questions of Scale in History,” in *The Challenge of Chance*, ed. Klaas Landsman and Ellen van Wolde (Cham: Springer, 2016), 215–32 (215).

Jesus concluded a description of an apocalyptic event with a promise that “Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.”<sup>7</sup> This biographer noted that this verse proved that Jesus had erred; the world did not end within the lifetimes of Jesus’s audience. A verse making Jesus look good might have easily been inserted by a sympathetic editor, but not a verse that makes Jesus look bad. Therefore, according to the biographer’s plain-ken logic, this verse was likely to be original and authentic.<sup>8</sup>

Because our intellectual values are still set by the plain ken, it can be difficult for us to see value in the deep ken. We historians are skeptical of coincidences, of beauty, of round numbers, of what we suspect are literary tropes. In our eyes, these things are suspicious, while in deep-ken eyes, they would be auspicious. Instead, we love the idea of humans doing things haphazardly. This is the fundamental tool in the historian’s toolbox. It allows us to prove our cleverness and value by partaking in the unexpected genius of *lectio difficilior potior*, the “More Difficult Reading,” by which a text difficult to read is preferred over a clearer variation, which was presumably fixed by some editor.

One of this book’s goals is to make a case for the deep ken being intelligent and plausible. Other parts of the world discovered the plain ken earlier, but, for them, its magic quickly wore off. As we have seen, in the West the plain ken became reality, but in the Asian Cores and the Middle East, the plain ken was a tool to be used alongside, or subordinate to, the deep ken. Even as some Muslim scholars brought the plain ken to bear on the Qur’an (ca. eight to tenth century), others were arguing against it: did the truth of the Qur’an bow to mere historical studies? Even an occasional European could discount the new perspective: Lorenzo Guidetti (1439–1519) held historical minutiae, “barely known by anyone even in those time,” to be less interesting or important than the beauty of elegant rhetorical forms.<sup>9</sup> In deep-ken eyes, the plain ken could only uncover the trivial, pedantic, unimportant, irrelevant, and irreverent. A

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7 Mt 24:34; Mk 13:30.

8 I read this biography in the 1990s, before I knew I would be writing my own Jesus book, and lost the reference, but the idea made an impression and motivated this project. Bertrand Russell’s “certainly” makes a similar point when he notes that Jesus “certainly thought that His second coming would occur [...] before the death of all the people who were living at that time,” an idea that does not “seem to be very wise.” Bertrand Russell, “Why I Am Not a Christian,” in *Why I Am Not a Christian: And Other Essays on Religion and Related Subjects*, ed. Paul Edwards (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957), 3–23 (16).

9 Guidetti to Massari, 14 October [1465], in *La critica del Landino*, ed. Roberto Cardini (Florence: Sansoni, 1973), 267–69. See Anthony Grafton, *Defenders of the Text: The Traditions of Scholarship in an Age of Science, 1450–1800* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1991), 23–26. Grafton’s description has a clear articulation of one aspect of the deep ken: in Guidetti’s view a theoretical “pupil would be able to extract

deep-ken parody of the plain ken might hold that Karl Marx did not write the *Communist Manifesto*; rather, his right hand did.

My (plain ken!) life circumstances, professional and personal, have conspired (coincidentally!) to habituate me to the plain ken. I can appreciate the beauty and usefulness of the deep ken as well as the plain ken, but—despite my attempt with the Nicodemian Age—I cannot see, think, or write with the deep ken. I am too thoroughly trained to be able to abandon the plain ken that defines my perspective. I can appreciate the truth of both kens, but I write about both of them only from the plain ken.

How that habit and prejudice came to be is a major focus of the book; the division between the plain ken and the deep ken is itself a product of history. If you think one way is obviously right, you will find it difficult to understand the logic of those who approach things from the other. Being aware of both approaches powerfully expands our intellectual horizons, and deepens our capacity for empathy. If we habitually discount unexpected beauties and conjunctions in history as coincidence or trickery, we are left with an artificially ugly and boring history.

The deep ken is attracted to beauty, and the plain ken suspicious of it, preferring the ugliness of haphazard history. However, at certain times the deep ken can find and appreciate beauty within the ugly. Jesus once made a similar point himself. A 1501 manuscript of the Persian poet Nizami Ganjavi's (d. 1209) epic *Khamsa* [Quintet] cycle contains its own dog art, an intriguing rendering of an intriguing incident (see Fig. 22.2). Once, the "feet of Christ, walking on the earth, passed across a small market place" at a crossroads, where Jesus saw the corpse of a dog. Disgusted spectators, "like carrion-eating vultures," gathered to poetically express their distaste: one remarked that their fear of the canine corpse had brought "darkness to the mind, as breath blows out the lamp." Relocated in a wilderness setting, Nizami's dog is doing a headstand, ignoring any plain-ken inducement towards illusionism in order to maximize its wretchedness. Jesus, however, expressed a positive reaction, finding a beauty perfecting the ugly: "the picture remaining of its body shows that pearls are not so white as its teeth." The onlookers, corrected, used burnt oyster shell to whiten their own teeth. Perhaps influenced by Buddhist ideas, the poet shifts into a moralizing mode, encouraging modesty before concluding with the plain-ken sentiment that "the whole world, from its beginning to its end, is not worth a grain of barley, because it is transient."<sup>10</sup>

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from his text—an ideal thing outside of any particular time, space, or individual experience—a central core of moral and literary instruction" (25).

10 Nezāmi of Ganjeh, *Makhzanol Asrār: The Treasury Of Mysteries*, trans. Gholām Hosein Dārāb (London: Probsthain, 1945), 198–99 (tenth discourse, lines



Fig. 22.2 *Jesus and the Dead Dog* (1501), *Khamsah-i Nizāmī*, BodL MS Elliott 192, fol. 22b, Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, <https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/objects/ed3dac54-cfc0-43b5-9eb7-6214abe98094/surfaces/97361cff-fc62-4a67-9fee-9748dad55490>

This same appreciation recurs in several historical moments. A thread of it runs through much of the Islamic tradition. The scholar Abu 'Ubayda (728–825), for example, fully accepted philology and the plain ken it implied, but placed it all within the deep ken. He argued that God's decision to express the eternal Qur'an in Arabic, a language subject to change, brought divine favour upon the language in all its varieties, and he felt free to make use of even pre-Islamic

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1542–59). This is the first of the five treasures that make up the *Khamsa*. The core of the tradition, with just a single insult and Jesus's praise of the canine's teeth, dates back to Abu Bakr ibn Abi al-Dunya (d. 894). Tarif Khalidi, ed., *The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2001), 122–23 (no. 127). Miguel Asín y Palacios, "Logia et agrapha domini Jesu apud moslemicos scriptores, asceticos praesertim, usitata," in *Patrologia Orientalis*, 50 vols. (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1919–26), XIII, 335–431 and XIX, 531–624 (607) reports Goldhizer identifying this tradition as having Buddhist origins. For early Buddhist influences on Islam, see Ignaz Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law*, trans. Andras and Ruth Hamori (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1981), 141–44.



poetry. For Abu ‘Ubayda and like-minded thinkers, the messy problems in the Qur’anic text’s language were themselves praiseworthy, and part of the overall miracle.<sup>11</sup> Echoing a similar insight, the poet ‘Abd al-Karim al-Jili (ca. 1366–1408) wrote:

If you bring it back to its beauty, everything ugly  
Will immediately open beautiful meanings to you.  
The imperfection of the ugly is made perfect by its beauty:  
There, there is no imperfection, nor is there ugliness.<sup>12</sup>

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- 11 Claude Gilliot, *Exégèse, Langue et Théologie en Islam: L'exégèse coranique de Tabari* (m. 311/923) (Paris: J. Vrin, 1990), 73–78; Alexander Knysh, “Multiple Areas of Influence,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur’ān*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2006), 211–33 (213–14); E. Almagor, “The Early Meaning of *Majāz* and the Nature of Abū ‘Ubayda’s Exegesis,” in *Studia orientalia: Memoriae D. H. Baneth dedicata*, ed. Joshua Blau, Shlomo Pines, Meir Jacob Kister, and Shaul Shaked (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1979), 325.
- 12 Quoted by Aḥmad Ibn ‘Ajība [1747–1809], *Two Treatises on the Oneness of Existence by the Moroccan Sufi Aḥmad Ibn ‘Ajība*, trans. Jean-Louis Michon (Cambridge, UK: Archetype, 2010), 53–57.

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# Glossary

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The deep ken seeks perfect correspondence between name and named; the plain ken allows for linguistic experimentation. This book uses new terms that better reflect the fifteenth-century reality. They are explained at their first occurrences, and collected here for reference. A few standard technical terms are also included.

deep ken – perspective seeing subtle, meaningful connections

plain ken – perspective seeing accidental history enfolding in spacetime

monotropic – tending to cultivate a relationship with only one spiritual being

polytropic – tending to cultivate relationships with multiple spiritual beings

Late Traditional – world from ca. 1400 to 1800 (“Early Modern”)

Sinic Core – China and its sphere of cultural influence (“East Asia”)

Indic Core – India and its sphere of cultural influence (“South Asia”)

Near West – peripheral region immediately west of the Core (“Middle East”)

Far West – peripheral region west of the Near West (“Europe”)

Ploughlands – densely populated Eurasian region of plough agriculture; Sinic and Indic Cores, plus the Near and Far West

CrossTech 3.0 – newly developed culture of using the cross as spiritual technology

*naskh* النسخ – literally, to make or delete a copy; thus, a functional secretarial script used for copying or, a newer revelation’s abrogation or cancelling of an older

skepticism – belief in the impossibility of having certain knowledge

consonance – harmony among musical notes; by extension, harmony created via deep-ken connections

consonate – to create or embody a harmonious connection, visible to the deep ken



# Appendix A: Historiographical Context

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This book traces a partial shift from deep ken to plain ken in the fifteenth-century Far West, a pivotal moment in the conventional history of modernization. This roughly parallels Max Weber's (1864–1920) “disenchantment,”<sup>1</sup> Johan Huizinga's (1872–1945) switch from “symbolic” to “causal” thinking,<sup>2</sup> and Peter Burke's change from symbol-mindedness to literal-mindedness.<sup>3</sup> Each of these processes is so subtle and amorphous that it makes little sense to argue vigorously that it is, or is not, the same as, or a facet of, a single phenomenon. This book takes these expansive concepts and expands them further, linking them up with topics in multiple disciplines: linear perspective, history, space, and literal readings of texts.

There are also similarities between the deep ken and Carl Jung's (1875–1961) synchronicity. The subtitle of his 1952 paper introducing that concept explains it as “an Acausal Principle of Interrelations.” He describes synchronicity as a “*meaningful coincidence* of two or more events, where something other than the probability of chance is involved,” between things “remote in space and time.” Jung's synchronicity is thus in opposition to our plain ken. Like the deep ken, synchronicity finds resonance, or consonance, or connections between things

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- 1 Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1930). Parsons translates the original's *Entzauberung* as “elimination of magic” (105, 149) or “rationalization” (117, 147). Stephen Kalberg's translation (*The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Routledge, 2012)), uses “elimination of magic,” at 60, 70, 95. See Alexandra Walsham, “The Reformation and ‘The Disenchantment of the World’ Reassessed,” *The Historical Journal* 51 (2008): 497–528, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X08006808>
  - 2 Johan Huizinga, *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*, trans. Rodney J. Payton and Ulrich Mammitzsch (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 234–48.
  - 3 Peter Burke, “The Rise of Literal-Mindedness,” in *Words*, ed. Ernst van den Hemel and Asja Szafranec (New York: Fordham UP, 2014), 364–75. Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1957) also approaches this shift from a variety of angles.

not obviously connected. Jung noted that the apparent discontinuities of synchronicity were “no more baffling or mysterious than the discontinuities of physics.”<sup>4</sup> The idea of connection replacing causation was also emphasized by historian of science Joseph Needham (1900–95). Needham explained it thus: “If two objects seemed to them to be connected, it was not by means of a cause-and-effect relationship, but rather ‘paired’ like the obverse and reverse of something, or to use a metaphor from the Book of Changes, like echo and sound, or shadow and light.”<sup>5</sup> Synchronicity is non-causal. Unlike Jung’s synchronicity, our deep ken can see links that do have causal consequence. Both kens can be causal. In a deep ken, Susie piously reading a Latin Bible causes her to understand its true content. In a plain ken, Susie reading any Bible in a language she can read causes her to understand its true content. Even if the relationship between two things is not causal, that relationship itself can have causal consequences. Consonance has consequence; octaves have consequences.<sup>6</sup>

The modernization scholarship that comes closest to the two kens has been on changes in a sense of history and time. How have historians understood traditional time? Scholars have probed changes in perceptions of time before the fifteenth century, on scales both macro (time conceptualized as history) and micro (time experienced in a day).<sup>7</sup> Lucien Febvre (1878–1956) describes

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- 4 C. G. Jung, *Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1973), 31, 102, 104 (his italics). For more on space and time, see Jung, *Synchronicity*, 17–21, 29–31, 89–98. This may be a reference to Albert Einstein, who wrote: “I cannot make a case for my attitude in physics which you would consider at all reasonable. I admit, of course, that there is a considerable amount of validity in the statistical approach which you were the first to recognise clearly as necessary given the framework of the existing formalism. I cannot seriously believe in it because the theory cannot be reconciled with the idea that physics should represent a reality in time and space, free from spooky [spukhafte] actions at a distance.” Albert Einstein and Max Born, *The Born-Einstein Letters*, trans. Irene Born (New York: Walker, 1981), 158 (letter of 3 March 1947).
- 5 Joseph Needham, *The Grand Titration: Science and Society in East and West* (London: G. Allen and Unwin, 1969), 290. Needham pointed to Marcel Granet’s idea of, in the words of Witold Jabłoński, “a causal orderliness” where the “idea of correspondence has great significance and replaces the idea of causality; things are connected and not caused.” Witold Jabłoński, “Marcel Granet: His Work,” *Yenching Journal of Social Studies* 1 (1939): 253.
- 6 Johan Huizinga contrasted symbolic and causal (or causal-scientific) thinking: “Viewed from a standpoint of causal thinking, symbolism represents an intellectual shortcut”—*een geestelijke kortsluiting*, literally a “short circuit.” Johan Huizinga, *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*, trans. Rodney J. Payton and Ulrich Mammitzsch (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 236–38 (ch. 9).
- 7 Jacques Le Goff associates economic growth with a quantification of time, which concept became more “certain” and expanded to include “daily life” (48). Jacques Le Goff, “Labor Time in the ‘Crisis’ of the Fourteenth Century: From Medieval Time to Modern Time,” in *Time, Work, and Culture in the Middle Ages*, trans. Arthur

a world that “would never know the exact time when the [clock] bell rang,” where birthdays were typically forgotten, where “experienced time” dominated over “measured time,” and where “men of the past lacked a historical sense.”<sup>8</sup> Marc Bloch (1886–1944) wrote, condescendingly, about how the technology limitations of medieval people meant that “the passage of time escaped their grasp.”<sup>9</sup> More positively, Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood describe an “omnitemporal” understanding of history, which, “presupposed by figural thinking,” implied “an effort to adopt God’s point of view, which grasped history all at once, topologically, rather than in a linear sequence.”<sup>10</sup> Ernst Kantorowicz (1895–1963) discusses legal history with regards to late-medieval changes of the concept of time.<sup>11</sup> Matthew Champion sums up well the general notion of the “vague ecclesiastical rhythms” of “imprecise, natural, and organic traditional time”: “a disturbingly naive sense of time, where a kind of static or cyclical liturgical time colonizes the past, making it inhabit an eternal present [...] a weak sense of anachronism [...] an ethereal timelessness.”<sup>12</sup>

In the Far West, the Renaissance marks the end of this medieval concept of time. Burke has described the “Renaissance sense of the past”: a humanist interest in the details of antiquity led to a sense of anachronism, to a sense of distance from, but also nostalgic longing for, antiquity. He has broken that “sense of history” into three elements, “a sense of anachronism [...] awareness of evidence [...] interest in causation.”<sup>13</sup> Time-keeping began to involve “precise

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Goldhammer (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 43–52, 293–96. See Matthew S. Champion, *The Fullness of Time: Temporalities of the Fifteenth-Century Low Countries* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2017) and Gerhard Dohrn-van Rossum, *History of the Hour: Clocks and Modern Temporal Orders*, trans. Thomas Dunlap (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 217–321. In *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia UP, 1983), Johannes Fabian talks about the implications of the spatialization of time for the discipline of anthropology.

- 8 Lucien Febvre, *Problem of Unbelief in the Sixteenth Century*, trans. Beatrice Gottlieb (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1982), 393–400.
- 9 Marc Bloch, *Feudal Society*, trans. L. A. Manyon, 2 vols. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961), I, 72–75.
- 10 Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance* (New York: Zone, 2010), 32.
- 11 Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1957), 275–84. See Paul Raffield, “Time, Equity, and the Artifice of English Law: Reflections on *The King’s Two Bodies*,” *Law, Culture and the Humanities* 13 (2014): 36–45, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1743872114534800>
- 12 Champion, *The Fullness of Time*, 2–6.
- 13 Peter Burke, “The Sense of Historical Perspective in Renaissance Italy,” *Cahiers d’histoire mondiale* 11 (1968): 615–32; Peter Burke, *The Renaissance Sense of the Past* (London: Edward Arnold, 1969), 1; Peter Burke, “The Sense of Anachronism from Petrarch to Poussin,” in *Time in the Medieval World*, ed. C. Humphrey and W. M.

mercantile practices.”<sup>14</sup> Indeed, historians have been sensitive to humanists’ idea that the past is qualitatively different from the present, with a nostalgic awareness of an unwelcome distance from antiquity, and an ironic distance from the medieval.<sup>15</sup> Walter Benjamin (1892–1940) linked “the concept of the historical progress of mankind” to “the concept of its progression through a homogeneous, empty time.”<sup>16</sup> The plain ken accommodates all this: The pasts were qualitatively different, but at the same time they were not fundamentally different. Antiquity was a good version of now, and the medieval a bad version of now, but both were fundamentally similar to now. That fundamental sameness underlying a continuum of difference is what allows the assessment of qualitative difference to be possible in the first place.

Of course, changes in time have ramifications throughout a culture and society. Samuel Kinser argued that “the cultural climate of opinion largely determines one’s notions of time; conversely, one’s ideas of time influence one’s vision of culture. Temporal conceptions must therefore be related to the cultural conceptions of those propounding them, if they are to be explained and understood.”<sup>17</sup> In particular, Erwin Panofsky (1892–1968) linked a historical view to the new linear perspective in the visual arts, which facilitated a composition existing in a “fully rational—that is, infinite, continuous, and homogeneous—space.”<sup>18</sup> Along the same lines, Samuel Edgerton explained how Paolo dal Pozzo Toscanelli (1397–1482) described the earth as “rectilinear grid” buttressing a “new sense of conformity,” rather than “a heterogeneous assemblage of frightening unknowns.” That transformation inspired Christopher Columbus (1451–1506) and Leon Battista Alberti (1404–72).<sup>19</sup>

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Ormrod (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 2001), 157–73; Peter Burke, *Secret History and Historical Consciousness: From the Renaissance to Romanticism* (Brighton: Edward Everett Root, 2016). See also Alessandro Arcangeli, “Reading Time: The Act of Reading and Early Modern Time Perceptions,” *Journal of Early Modern Studies* 6 (2017): 17–37, <https://doi.org/10.13128/JEMS-2279-7149-20387>

14 Champion, *The Fullness of Time*, 2.

15 Burke, “Sense of Anachronism,” 158.

16 Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt and trans. Harry Zohn (Boston, MA: Mariner, 2019), 196–210 (205).

17 Samuel Kinser, “Ideas of Temporal Change and Cultural Process in France 1470–1535,” in *Renaissance: Studies in Honor of Hans Baron*, ed. Anthony Molho and John A. Tedeschi (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois UP, 1971), 703–57 (707).

18 Erwin Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972 [1930]), 108; Erwin Panofsky, “Die Perspektive als ‘symbolische Form,’” in *Aufsätze zu Grundfragen der Kunstwissenschaft*, ed. Hariolf Oberer und Egon Verheyen (Berlin: Volker Spiess, 1980 [1927]), 99–167 (101).

19 Samuel Y. Edgerton, Jr., “Florentine Interest in Ptolemaic Cartography as Background for Renaissance Painting, Architecture, and the Discovery of

This table collects some of the ways historians have characterized both the medieval and the modern sense of time.<sup>20</sup>

| MEDIEVAL TIME                                      | MODERN TIME                                       |
|--|---|
| vague, imprecise, flexible                         | precise, exact, measured, uniform<br>“clock” time |
| static, timeless, changeless,<br>“eternal present” | dynamic   |
| cyclical <sup>21</sup>                             | linear  |
| liturgical   | mercantile <sup>22</sup>                          |
| naive  | sophisticated                                     |
| natural, organic                                   | mechanized, <sup>23</sup> abstract                |
| particularistic, parochial                         | universal   |
| agrarian   | industrial <sup>24</sup>                          |
| heterogeneous                                      | homogeneous                                       |
| full   | empty   |

Table A.1 Historians’ Descriptions of Medieval and Modern Time.

The timing and degree of these kinds of shifts are debatable. Elizabeth Eisenstein (1923–2016) sees a lesser gap between the medieval and Renaissance senses of the past, and the greater gap between the Renaissance sense and our own. The Renaissance “expressions of nostalgic longing for a past that has gone forever” she finds also in a medieval context, but did not see our modern “sense of ‘fixed’ distance” in the Renaissance, where the past was close and full of potential. Eisenstein detects only a “growing sensitivity to anachronism” in the fifteenth century, and the “fixed spatial-temporal reference frame which men of learning shared” came only with the printing press. They recognized that medieval Latin was not classical Latin, but their confusion of ancient and

America,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 33 (1974): 275–92 (275).

- 20 I expect all the authors of the scholarship synthesized here would accept this as a simplification. Earlier and later time each had characteristics normally associated with the other. One example of sophisticated pre-modern conceptualization of time was Augustine’s. See R. A. Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2007); Andrew Redden, *The Collapse of Time* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 55–62; Zachary Sayre Schiffman, *The Birth of the Past* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 2011), 96–111.
- 21 For the holiday as a “historical time-lapse camera,” see Benjamin, “Theses,” 206.
- 22 See, especially, Le Goff, “Labor Time.”
- 23 E. P. Thompson, “Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism,” *Past & Present* 38 (1967): 56–97.
- 24 Anthony Grafton, “Dating History: The Renaissance and the Reformation of Chronology,” *Daedalus* 132 (2003): 74–85 (76).



contemporary sculpture meant that “some portions” of the ancient world “must have seemed very close at hand.” The lack of that “reference frame” meant it was hard for people in the fifteenth century to distinguish between ancient and contemporary works, whether textual or visual. For Eisenstein, this developed only after printing, and only then do we get the “total rationalized view” of ancient history.<sup>25</sup>

Some scholars have been sensitive to the complexity of every period’s notion of time.<sup>26</sup> Something akin to the deep/plain ken distinction is at play in recent scholarship on “heterotemporality.” Historians also see modern time and space as complex (“heterotemporality” and “heteroscopia,” respectively).<sup>27</sup> Kimberly Hutchings talks of a “mutual contamination of ‘nows’ that participate in a variety of temporal trajectories.”<sup>28</sup> Nils Riecken describes Abdallah Laroui’s heterotemporality as the “irreducible multiplicity of discordant temporalities.”<sup>29</sup> Derek R. Peterson distinguishes a “heterotemporal” world “with more than one time frame at play” from the “parochial pre-colonial world.”<sup>30</sup> Paul Ricoeur (1913–2005) notes that Fernand Braudel’s (1902–85) *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* “teaches us to unite structures, cycles, and events by joining together heterogeneous temporalities and contradictory chronicles.”<sup>31</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty seems to understand this as regions being at different stages of historical progress. He differentiates between “the plurality that inheres in the ‘now’, the lack of totality, the constant fragmentariness that constitutes one’s present” and the “empty and homogenous chronology of historicism.” Indeed, the modern sees its own time as “godless, continuous,

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25 Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1979), 183–87, 200. However, Albrecht Classen, “The Experience of and Attitude toward Time in Medieval German Literature from the Early Middle Ages to the Fifteenth Centuries,” *Neohelicon* 26 (1999): 135–54 argues against a distinctive medieval sense of time.

26 Jacques Le Goff, *Un autre Moyen Âge* (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), 403.

27 John Docker and Subhash Jaireth’s introduction to the *Benjamin and Bakhtin: Vision and Visuality* issue of *Journal of Narrative Theory* 33 (2003): 1–11, <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/30225775>

28 Kimberly Hutchings, *Time and World Politics* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2008), 166.

29 Nils Riecken, “Heterotemporality, the Islamic Tradition, and the Political: Laroui’s Concept of the Antinomy of History,” *History & Theory* 58 (2019): 132–53 (132), <https://doi.org/10.1111/hith.12139>

30 Derek R. Peterson, “Review of *Sources and Methods in African History*, ed. T. Falola and C. Jennings (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2004),” *The Historical Journal* 50 (2007): 483–97.

31 Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer, 3 vols. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1984), I, 216.

empty and homogeneous.”<sup>32</sup> Reinhart Koselleck (1923–2006) links modernity to an increase in distinct *geschichtliche Zeiten* [temporalities].<sup>33</sup> Much is relative and perspectival. I believe the older describers of a hard break between medieval and modern time would easily accept the more recent descriptions of modern heterotemporality, although they might have been at a loss to know what to do with it.

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32 Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2000), 75, 239–43.

33 Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985 [1979]), 3.



# Appendix B: Historical Development of the Plain Ken in Christianity

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The mainstream of the plain ken sees everything as contingent, without any underlying order except for the very fundamentals of logic and spacetime. Some radical medieval theologians, moved by the idea of the fullest possible divine omnipotence, argued that, in the face of God's awesome powers, even logic and spacetime could become contingent. Peter Damian (ca. 1007–72/73) contended that God could change history—not even ordered spacetime was immune from his intervention. For example, virginity once lost could still be restored.<sup>1</sup> Robert Holcot (ca. 1290–1349) contended that God could change at least some aspects of logic: our rules of inference (A implies B; A; therefore, B) were only true in this creation, but could be different elsewhere. Not even logic was stable given the full omnipotence of God.<sup>2</sup> Most mainstream theologians insisted instead that history and, especially, logic fenced in God's powers, but these radicals showed the possibilities of an extreme plain ken. Some Muslim scholars of the Ash'arite school embraced a plain ken that allowed for no causal connections at all, beyond the will of God. In describing the writing process, they held that God, not the hand, moved the pen, as in our *Communist Manifesto* in Chapter 22.

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- 1 Pierre Damien, *Lettre sur la toute-puissance divine*, ed. André Cantin (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1972), 398–405, 442–47, 472–81. See Alfredo Gatto, "Quomodo sit omnipotens cum multa non possit: Anselmo d'Aosta e Pier Damiani sull'onnipotenza divina," *Kriterion* 62 (2021): 387–408, <https://doi.org/10.1590/0100-512x2021n14904ag>. Gregory of Rimini (d. 1358) seems to have taught a weaker version of this: although God could not go back into the past to cancel a historical event, he could make it, now, to have not happened. See Amos Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1986), 127–29, 148–50; William J. Courtenay, "John of Mirecourt and Gregory of Rimini on Whether God Can Undo the Past," *Recherches de Théologie Ancienne et Médiévale* 39 (1972): 224–256 and 40 (1973): 147–74.
  - 2 Robert Holcot, *Supra IV libros sententiarum questiones* (Lyons: n.p., 1510), book 1, quaestio 5. See Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination*, 150–51.

Indeed, God moved the hand as well.<sup>3</sup> Events occur not arbitrarily as a result of human decisions, but in accordance with the will of the Universe, or of God.

It was the Franciscan order that most promoted the plain ken in the medieval Far West. One of the most famous Franciscans' most famous philosophical idea was emblematic of this plain-ken perspective. William of Ockham (1285–1347) refined and popularized what would centuries later become known as Ockham's razor. Stated simply, the razor's principle had been easily accepted as an axiom, by ancient Greeks<sup>4</sup> as well as medieval Christians: because the best explanation is the simplest, most persuasive one, the razor justifies shaving off unnecessary assumptions. Ockham and his arch-nemesis, the theologian Walter Chatton (1285–1343) fought a bitter feud in the shadow of this commonplace. Ockham held that "if two things are sufficient for [a proposition's] truth, then it is superfluous to posit a third,"<sup>5</sup> while Chatton countered that "If three things are not sufficient to verify it, one must put in a fourth."<sup>6</sup> In fact, both men were indignantly arguing opposite sides of the same coin: any thing below the minimum necessary was necessary, and anything above it was unnecessary. The two principles were equally reasonable, perfectly consistent, and usefully complementary.<sup>7</sup>

Here, and often, the razor was applied to arguments, and was fundamentally about scholars' convenience: needlessly complex proofs benefited neither writer nor reader. Sometimes, however, a theologian used the razor to make an argument not about explanations of reality, but about reality itself. Thomas Aquinas (1225–74), for example, used the razor to demonstrate the existence of God.<sup>8</sup> The usual adjective wielded to condemn a too-complex explanation,

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- 3 Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. Schlomo Pines, 2 vols. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1963), I, 203 (I.73). See William J. Courtenay, "The Critique on Natural Causality in the Mutakallimun and Nominalism," *Harvard Theological Review* 66 (1973): 77–94.
  - 4 Aristotle, *Physics*, 189a15; 1.4 (188a17); 8.6 (259a8); Aristotle, *De caelo*, 1.4 (271a23); Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, 1.25 (86a33).
  - 5 William of Ockham, *Quodlibetal Questions*, trans. Alfred J. Freddoso and Francis E. Kelley, 2 vols. (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1991), I, 341 (IV.24); William of Ockham, *Quodlibeta septem*, ed. Joseph C. Wey, *Opera theologica* 9 (St. Bonaventure: St. Bonaventure University, 1980), 707.
  - 6 Walter Chatton, *Reportatio super Sententias*, in BnF MS Lat. 15887, fol. 63r.
  - 7 Roger Ariew, "Did Ockham Use His Razor?," *Franciscan Studies* 37 (1977): 5–17; James Franklin, *The Science of Conjecture: Evidence and Probability Before Pascal* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins, 2001), 240–42; Eric W. Hagedorn, "The Changing Role of Theological Authority in Ockham's Razor," *Res Philosophica* 99 (2022): 97–120, <https://doi.org/10.11612/resphil.2165>; Armand Augustine Maurer, *Being and Knowing: Studies in Thomas Aquinas and Later Medieval Philosophers* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1990), 403–21, 431–43.
  - 8 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologica*, I, q. 2, art. 3. The traditional translation, by Laurence Shapcote (1864–1947), generously minimizes the force of the formulation—suggesting it is about scholarly convenience rather than reality—by

*frustra*, had both meanings, “in error” (about reality) and “pointless” (about arguments).<sup>9</sup> One can understand the slippage between the two meanings. Consider two valid proofs of a proposition, one working from three assumptions (A, B, and C) and the other from two different assumptions (X and Y). Ockham, among many other scholars, would point out that if A, B, and C suffice for the proof, it is *frustra* [pointless] to add another assumption D; similarly, if X and Y suffice, adding Z would also be *frustra*. The urge to prefer ABC over ABCD is the same as that which propels my editor to want to trim this paragraph—convenience and beauty, but not truth. A far more questionable move, and today’s popular understanding of the razor, is to say that if A, B, and C suffice as an explanation and X and Y suffice as an explanation, then *in reality*, X and Y are the true explanation, and A, B, and C the false explanation, because two is less than three.

Ockham recognized that an all-powerful God could order, or disorder, reality however he wanted. God’s omnipotence was widely recognized in a vague sense, but Ockham fully embraced its consequences. God could use A, B, and C to cause something, even if X and Y could equally have worked, simply because of his own preference. The convenience of scholars was not necessarily God’s priority. As Ockham explained, “Many things God does through more things which he could do through fewer, and there is no other cause to be sought. And hence whatever he wants is suitable and not *frustra*.”<sup>10</sup> For our purposes, most important is not Ockham’s using his razor to trim away scholars’ intellectual proliferation, but rather his refusal to use his razor to shave the face of God.<sup>11</sup>

The plain ken is rooted in this medieval theology. Before Ockham, things happened in an orderly way because God loved order and loved us. With Ockham, things happen in an apparently random way because God chooses for them to happen that way. A sense of skepticism, an awareness of the limits of our

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saying the use of more is “superfluous,” but the original Latin is just a prohibition without explanation.

- 9 William of Ockham, *Ockham’s Theory of Terms: Part I of the Summa Logicae*, trans. Michael J. Loux (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1974), 74 (1.12); William Ockham, *Summa logicae: Pars prima*, ed. Philotheus Boehner (St. Bonaventure: Franciscan Institute, 1957), 39 (1.12). This is almost identical to the earliest “*frustra*” formulation, that of Odo Rigaldus (d. 1275). See Philotheus Boehner’s introduction to William of Ockham, *Philosophical Writings: A Selection* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1990), xx; “*frustrā*,” in *A Latin Dictionary*, ed. Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879), 786.
- 10 William of Ockham, *Scriptum in librum primum Sententiarum, Distictiones IV–XVIII*, ed. Girardus I. Etzkorn, *Opera theologica* 3 (St. Bonaventure: St. Bonaventure UP, 1977), 432.
- 11 The most modern formulation of the razor is the United States military’s principle to “Keep it simple, stupid.” Simplicity is a virtue in soldiers as well as in scholars, but Ockham’s point, expressed in modern terms, is the reckless foolishness in telling God to “keep it simple, stupid.”

knowledge of God's will, creates a haphazard mental space. Our modern, secular worldview retains this apparent randomness, but has forgotten its origins in the whims of God. The skeptic al-Ghazali's (ca. 1058–1111) formulation of this randomness, the idea that a horse might be defecating in his library, comes close to the modern vernacular formulation, "shit happens." Apparent randomness is only "shit" because we do not understand God's will, which is difficult when we do not believe in God.

Alongside this historicism, the Franciscans developed a second road to the plain ken, in a more philosophical approach to the question of whether Jesus owned property: nominalism.<sup>12</sup> First developed by the Franciscans Duns Scotus (ca. 1255/56–1308) and Ockham and others in the fourteen century, nominalism came to dominate the universities of northern Europe in the fifteenth.

For the nominalists, there was nothing magical that forces us to call a cow a "cow," but a convention had arisen by which you knew what was meant by "cow." The nominalists believed that "cow" was merely a label that we apply to this cow, to that cow, and to that cow over there; it did not refer to any metaphysical universal category of cows. This was a world of particular cows, and of other particular things, not of abstractions and categories. It was a world of faith in particular things, the world of the mystic, not a world of universal truths, not a world of logic and reason. Humans knew particulars directly, unlike universals, which occurred only in the mind and in language.<sup>13</sup> The old reality-logic-truth synthesis broke down: because reason faltered against the freedom of God's absolute powers, many theological truths could no longer be demonstrated by logic. When sought under the logic of the deep-ken perspective, God and his truths became alien, distant, and unknowable.

The nominalists were interested less in the essence of things and the subtle connections between them, and more interested in how beings acted in time. How did God reveal himself? How do humans behave? How does God evaluate the behavior of humans? The will that motivated divine and human action commanded nominalists' attention, and the intellect became far less powerful in a world without deep-ken connections for it to detect. Reason could not make sense of creation or salvation, because God created these particularly. For the nominalists, then, revelation was more reliable than reason. Jesus was a teacher, precisely because he taught the revealed Word.

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12 I conflate *via moderna* with nominalism, to simplify. An accessible introduction is Michael Allen Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, 2008), 14–43.

13 This applied even to mathematics: the number ten had no reality beyond its appearance in the world, where someone might have ten fingers and ten toes—this opinion broke down the division between pure and applied mathematics, and paved the way for the so-called scientific revolution. See André Goddu, *The Physics of William of Ockham* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1984).

How did nominalism address the property issue? All Franciscans agreed that Jesus and his disciples owned no property as individuals. The Spiritual branch of the Franciscans went further, proclaiming that they also owned no property collectively. A legal schema allowed this to happen: if a benefactor donated property to the Franciscans, technically he would retain ownership while granting them its permanent use. When the donor died, the Franciscans would continue to enjoy the property's use, while the theoretical ownership transferred to the pope, as a trustee. Pope Nicholas III (ca. 1225–80) endorsed this view as acceptable in 1279. This created a contrast between the perfectly poor Franciscans (*using* property without *owning* any) and the rich papacy (*owning* both their own property and that of the Franciscans, while only *using* the former). Pope John XXII (1244–1334) pointed out the foolishness of this: because permanent use and ownership were indistinguishable in practice, the distinction could not exist. That is, if the donor owned the property but had no right to use it, that right having been ceded to the Franciscans, then ownership was a pointless concept. Because the idea of ownership was sacrosanct, John ruled, the schema itself must be faulty.

Ockham's rebuttal to John went back to his nominalism: property itself was contingent, a legal fiction—created after the expulsion from Eden, where there was no property—that assigned owners to things. He answered John's argument by distinguishing ownership from usage: usage was contingent, for the owner could cancel another's use of his property.<sup>14</sup>

For Ockham, the plain-ken understanding of property as contingent could be expanded to apply to everything, except to God himself. While God was necessary, everything in his creation was contingent. Even certain moral truths were true only because God had decreed them, not because they are somehow essentially moral or true. If God decreed that killing someone in history was moral, then it was.<sup>15</sup> Thus Jesus's historical teachings become ethics. These nominalists held that the actions of sinful humans had no intrinsic worth, but God had created a kind of contract by which he would find worth in those actions. Just as language worked through use and agreement, there was nothing meaningful that forced God to recognize value in our actions. He had created a convention ("covenant theology") by which he agreed to recognize value in some of them.

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14 John Kilcullen, "The Political Writings," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ockham*, ed. Paul Vincent Spade (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1999), 302–35.

15 This is the main thrust of Ockham's ethics, but I exaggerate slightly. For the possibility for Ockham of something like a natural morality, see A. S. McGrade, "Natural Law and Moral Omnipotence," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ockham*, ed. Spade, 273–301.



Thus, in Ockham's view, the Church and the path to salvation it guaranteed were also contingent, consequences of this created covenant. They had developed in history. God could just as easily come up with an entirely different system, such as salvation to those who worshipped oak trees. Jesus could have been incarnated as a donkey or as a stone.<sup>16</sup> That is, there was nothing necessary, logical, or essential about the Church-system he did in fact develop. Just like "cow" was a convention, so too was the Church. God's power was total and absolute, but he voluntarily created the rules for salvation, and thus limited his own powers to only those ordained by these rules. Jesus's sacrifice on the cross was significant only because God decided to place significance in it. No one needs to understand any subtle connections only visible in the deep ken, because God chose to create, and reveal, a clear mechanism for salvation, one that developed plainly in history.

The plain ken was by no means limited to the Franciscan order. In the 1330s, Paris debated Ockham's teachings. One student there, then, would emerge as a scholar in his own right, and royal advisor: In *De proportionibus proportionum* [On Ratios of Ratios], Nicole Oresme (ca. 1320/25–82) considered the ratio of the periods of two celestial bodies. A deep ken expected the ratio to be rational, for "if someone should construct a material clock would he not make all the motions and wheels as nearly commensurable as possible?" Oresme, however, believed that the ratio between their periods was irrational. Irregularity, for Oresme, did not offend celestial beauty. In fact, he later used this irregularity to cast doubts on the deep-ken connections between astrology and human fate, as it proved that astronomical positions never exactly repeated themselves.<sup>17</sup> Oresme also used plain-ken attention to the gospels' historical context to explain that Jesus's "give back to Caesar what is Caesar's" did not imply that all money belonged to the ruler (see Chapter 21).<sup>18</sup>

16 William of Ockham [attributed], "The Centiloquium Attributed to Ockham," ed. Philotheus Boehner, *Franciscan Studies* 1 (1941): 35–54 (44–45). This text was probably not by Ockham himself, but represents a similar position. See Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination*, 58, 122.

17 Nicholas Oresme, *De proportionibus proportionum and Ad pauca respicientes*, trans. Edward Grant (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1966), 83–111, 294–95; Nicole Oresme, *Nicole Oresme and the Kinematics of Circular Motion: Tractatus de commensurabilitate vel incommensurabilitate motuum celi*, trans. Edward Grant (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1971), 204–05. See William J. Courtenay, "The Early Career of Nicole Oresme," *Isis* 91 (2000): 542–48, <https://doi.org/10.1086/384854>

18 Nicholas Oresme, *The De Moneta of Nicholas Oresme and English Mint Documents*, trans. Charles Johnson (London: Nelson, 1956), 10–11.

# Appendix C: The Plain and Deep Kens

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## Example 1: Topologies

Note that the coordinate system we use is arbitrary. We measure latitude up from the equator, but could instead measure it up from the south pole ( $-90^\circ$ ). Because of circumstances at the intersection of Anglo-American history, London geography, and empire, we measure longitude from Greenwich, England, but could use instead Bethlehem's meridian as an index ( $35.2^\circ$  E). We measure elevation from sea level, but could instead use the world's average elevation (2,756 ft). We measure years from the birth of Jesus (shifted by four years), but could instead use the birth of the Buddha (545 BC, maybe). Simple arithmetic allows us to calculate the coordinates of Jesus's birth in our new south-pole-Bethlehem-average-elevation-Buddha coordinate system:  $121.7^\circ$  latitude,  $0^\circ$  longitude, -233 feet elevation, in the year 541 Anno Buddhae.

I propose that not only is this coordinate system arbitrary, but that this entire way of looking at spacetime is arbitrary. Mathematicians use the word "topology" to define the relationship between points in a space. One space is topologically equivalent to any space it can be stretched into without breaking or poking holes. The most famous example is a coffee mug's equivalence to a doughnut: they have the same topology because each has a single hole—the doughnut's hole is the same as the hole through the mug handle (see Fig. A.1). The mug also has a large dimple, for holding coffee, that has been completely smoothed out in the doughnut, but that is topologically irrelevant, for it has been neither broken nor poked through.



Fig. A.1 Keenan Crane and Henry Segerman, *Topology Joke* (2015), Wikimedia, CC BY-SA 3.0, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Topology\\_joke.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Topology_joke.jpg)

I classify the topology we've just been exploring as within the plain ken. This familiar topology is a four-dimensional spacetime, and the relationship between two points is the distance between them. I can locate an event precisely in this spacetime by giving four coordinates, three spatial and one temporal. Remember that this spacetime is continuous and homogeneous: it has no topological holes.

In the plain ken, the latitude dimension ranges from  $-90^\circ$  to  $90^\circ$ , with an index at the equator and Jesus at  $31.7^\circ$  N. In the deep ken, the calendar-day dimension ranges from 1 January to 31 December, with Jesus at 25 December. We can identify other such dimensions. Although the deep-ken topology is far more complex and nuanced than the plain, both are equally mathematical. The deep ken's space is like a ribbon bow, looping in on itself—those loops are "holes" in a topological sense. This is a complex, intentional space, with folds of space coming back to something like God or the birth of Jesus at its centre. In our complex deep-ken topology, space is not homogeneous, but actually hardwired into aspects of Jesus's life. Each point takes up meaning relative to its relationship to Jesus.

The plain-ken topology is "flat": events happen meaninglessly in homogeneous space, and humans create meaning using conventional language. In contrast, deep-ken topology has depth and texture; it folds in upon itself in a high number of dimensions. In the plain-ken topology, events happen randomly, meaninglessly (except for the meaning humans project onto them) in homogeneous space. In the deep-ken topology, events happen meaningfully in a complex space.

## Example 2: Bill's Saxophone

Meet Bill. "Bill is 34 years old. He is intelligent, but unimaginative, compulsive, and generally lifeless. In school, he was strong in mathematics but weak in the social sciences and humanities."<sup>1</sup>

As an exercise, I invite you to arrange these statements in order from *most likely* to be true to *least likely* to be true.

- (A) Bill is an accountant
- (B) Bill plays jazz for a hobby
- (C) Bill is an accountant who plays jazz for a hobby.

Bill sounds like a stereotypical accountant, and (A) is highly likely. The challenging issue is whether B or C is more likely to be true.

Approach 1 invokes representativeness and consonance. There is *consonance* between the description ("strong in mathematics") and (A) ("accountant"). There is *dissonance* between the description ("unimaginative, compulsive") and (B) ("jazz"). So (A) is likely, (B) is unlikely, and in (C=A+B) the two components, roughly, cancel each other out. Therefore, if we arrange these in order of likely truth:

- (A) Bill is an accountant
- (C=A+B) Bill is an accountant who plays jazz for a hobby.
- (B) Bill plays jazz for a hobby

87% of "statistically naive" (i.e., with no previous study of probability or statistics) undergraduates at Stanford University and the University of British Columbia chose Approach 1.

Approach 2 invokes probability and statistics. A "law" of probability asserts that any statement becomes less likely if you add a new requirement to it. Thus, if two statements differ only in that one has an additional requirement, that compounded statement is necessarily less likely. That a random playing card is a king is unlikely; that a random card is a king and a spade is even less likely. That Bill plays jazz is unlikely; that he plays jazz and \_\_\_\_\_ is less likely. No matter how you fill that blank, the new compounded statement is less likely. Even if you fill it with a scenario that is extremely likely ("Bill has two lungs,"

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1 Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman, "Judgments of and by Representativeness," in *Judgment under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases*, ed. Daniel Kahneman, Paul Slovic, and Amos Tversky (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1982), 84–98 (92).

“Bill has eaten bread”) or consonant (“Bill is an accountant”—which consonates with his math background), the new, compounded statement is less likely.

Therefore this compounded statement C is actually less likely than the unlikely statement B: it is more likely that Bill is a jazz player than that Bill is an accountant who plays jazz. If we arrange these in order of likely truth:

- (A) Bill is an accountant
- (B) Bill plays jazz for a hobby
- (C=A+B) Bill is an accountant who plays jazz for a hobby.

The most “sophisticated” experts (i.e., experts in modern probability and statistics) agree that Answer 2 is correct. People only go with Answer 1, the experts explain, because that method sometimes gives the right answer, and that “sometimes” drifts into “usually” in unsophisticated minds.<sup>2</sup>

The undergraduate’s “naive” logic has been described as relying on “representativeness,” on considering what Bill’s attributes “represent.” When asked to name a typical city, one might answer “Tokyo,” because it’s an iconic example that leaps to mind, even though many other cities would be more statistically typical.<sup>3</sup>

Perhaps those undergraduates were not wrong, but were approaching the problem from the deep-ken perspective. We cannot call up Bill and ask him what he likes to do for fun, because Bill was invented by psychologists for this exercise. Under these circumstances, it’s quite reasonable to make conclusions about the psychologists’ imagination based on consonance and representativeness. Fifteenth-century Christians believing in the all-powerful creator God are in a similar position. In a universe filled with random events (plain-ken perspective), the Answer 2 probability approach might be smart. However, if there’s an all-powerful God creating meaning (deep-ken perspective), Answer 1’s representative, consonant approach might win.

### Example 3: Flashing Lights

In this example, college students tend to use the deep-ken approach, but are out-performed by pigeons using the plain-ken approach.

Imagine an experiment where you are watching two lights. First, the red light flashes, then again, then the green light flashes. Over time, you realize that

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2 Ibid., 89.

3 Ibid., 86.

the red light flashes about 70% of the time, and the green light 30%. You are then asked to predict what colour each of the next 10 flashes will be.

One strategy is to make your predictions “match” the frequency. When asked subsequently to predict the next ten lights, you would say red for the first 7 and green for the last 3. Another strategy is called “maximizing.” You predict red for each of the next ten, since it’s the more common colour. Matching gives you 58% correct answers; maximizing gives you 70% correct answers. Humans usually match; pigeons usually maximize.<sup>4</sup> That is, humans like to find the underlying pattern (deep ken), *even when it is not optimal*.

The frequency-matching approach locates consonance between the observed frequencies (“the underlying truth of the universe”) and the person’s responses (the deep ken). The maximizing strategy is cruder. Once you know which colour is more frequent, you go with that colour, regardless of whether its frequency is 50.001% or 99.999%. Perhaps humans like to find underlying patterns because they believe in the dependence of events: if the first seven of the ten lights are red, and 70% are red, then “obviously” the next three are going to be green.

Both kens align with ingrained parts of human psychology. This desire to find underlying patterns (deep ken, frequency matching), to find causal links, is physiologically located in the left hemisphere of the brain. There is demonstrable evidence for this.<sup>5</sup> Recent studies have partially localized “associative” thought to the superior temporal gyrus of the temporal lobe. The choice of adjectives used by plain-ken-oriented scientists to describe this kind of deep-ken thought is revealing: “insightful,” “distant,” “novel,” and “remote.”<sup>6</sup>

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- 4 W. K. Estes, “A Descriptive Approach to the Dynamics of Choice Behavior,” *Behavioral Science* 6 (1961): 177–84; John M. Hinson and J. E. R. Staddon, “Matching, Maximizing and Hill-climbing,” *Journal of the Experimental Analysis of Behaviour* 40 (1983): 321–31.
  - 5 George Wolford, Michael B. Miller, and Michael Gazzaniga, “The Left Hemisphere’s Role in Hypothesis Formation,” *The Journal of Neuroscience* 20:RC64 (2000): 1–4, <https://doi.org/10.1523/jneurosci.20-06-j0003.2000>
  - 6 For overviews see Mark Jung-Beeman, Edward M. Bowden, Jason Haberman, Jennifer L. Frymiare, Stella Arambel-Liu, Richard Greenblatt, Paul J. Reber, and John Kounios, “Neural Activity When People Solve Verbal Problems with Insight,” *PLoS Biology* 2 (2004): e97, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pbio.0020097>; Wangbing Shen, Jing Luo, Chang Liu, and Yuan Yuan, “New Advances in the Neural Correlates of Insight: A Decade in Review of the Insightful Brain,” *Chinese Science Bulletin* 58 (2013): 1497–1511, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11434-012-5565-5>. Ian McGilchrist, *The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.12987/9780300247459> links the brain’s two hemispheres to two “different modes of experience” (3–4), with the left attuned to enduring categories and the right to particular experiences. His vision of a world dominated by the left-hemisphere mode does resemble our plain ken: “An increasingly mechanistic, fragmented, decontextualised world, marked by unwarranted optimism mixed

### Example 4: Greek Urns

Some fourteenth-century manuscripts of the thirteenth-century poem *De Vetula* [About the Old Woman] include lists of all possible outcomes of throwing three six-sided dice.<sup>7</sup> Rolling a six-sided die three hundred times should yield how many fives? A deep ken might see the underlying structure of the universe, so to speak, and recognize the die's six sides. One sixth of three hundred rolls—fifty rolls—should be fives. (Note that this “should” is the same “should” that reflects the underlying structure of the universe and appears in moral statements like “one should pray to God” and “one should not lie.”) A plain ken, embracing the messiness of the world, would roll the die three hundred times and report back. There is no specific result that “should” happen. In this way, we might link the deep ken to probability, and the plain ken to statistics.<sup>8</sup>

Let's consider a more complex example: consider a room with two urns. What are the odds for each urn that, if you reached in to pull out a pebble, the pebble would be white?

The first urn is known to have 3,000 white pebbles and 2,000 black pebbles. The odds of pulling out a white pebble is 60% (3,000/5,000).

You don't know what the second urn contains. However, you are allowed to pick out a pebble, record its colour, reintroduce it to the urn, randomize the urn with a good shake, and repeat this process as much as you want. The first pebble, black, doesn't tell you much. After nine more picks, your ten results include two more black pebbles, and seven white ones. After a million picks, you've verified 604,591 white pebbles and 395,409 black ones. You conclude the odds of pulling out a white pebble are 60.4591%. (If you believed the urn's filler likes round numbers, you might fudge the odds to 60%.)

The first urn represents a deep-ken approach. There is an underlying pattern (certain knowledge, pre-existing knowledge) that dictates how the universe works. If we're lucky, that underlying pattern is revealed to us. You approached the first urn using probability, and you have a “certainty” (!) in your calculations of the odds because you have special knowledge.

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with paranoia and a feeling of emptiness” (6), but even this description is judgmental and psychological. His general descriptions of the two modes suggest fuzzy definitions, and correspond only imperfectly with the plain and deep kens.

- 7 D. R. Bellhouse, “*De Vetula*: A Medieval Manuscript Containing Probability Calculations,” *International Statistical Review* 68 (2000): 123–36, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-5823.2000.tb00317.x>. See also F. N. David, *Games, Gods, and Gambling: The Origins and History of Probability and Statistical Ideas from the Earliest Times to the Newtonian Era* (New York: Hafner, 1962), 30–33.
- 8 This is an unusual case, in that the modern mind inclines more towards the deep ken than the plain. This reflects the mathematical certainty involved.

The second urn represents a plain-ken approach. Things happen randomly, but we can construct an approximate knowledge to guide us. You approach the second urn using statistics. You had no special knowledge, but gained insight by repeated experimentation—or believed you gained insight. The more trials you repeated, the more confident (not “certain”) you were about the contents of the urn. That is a psychological quality; it’s possible (but “unlikely”) that there is a single white pebble in the urn, and you are unlucky in picking it far more often than you “should” randomly. God, who some evidence suggests has a sense of humour, might have had you pick the *single white pebble* in the second urn 604,591 times.

We can also imagine a third urn, about the contents of which you know nothing, and with which you cannot perform any trials. You only know it was filled by God, who on occasion has revealed knowledge to humans. What are the odds that your one pick would result in a white pebble? Here, probability and statistics fail you, and your best recourse is to look through those divine revelations to try to find out—through consonance and representativeness—God’s colour preferences, and whether he likes pebbles at all. Indeed, scholars have argued the Greeks did not develop a sophisticated sense of probability precisely because they had active gods: it makes no sense to hypothesize random independent events in a world governed by unseen and unpredictable beings.

### Example 5: Random Numbers

Some numbers smell funny, to some perspectives. The plain ken finds 100,000 suspicious, while the deep ken finds it beautiful, reliable and authoritative. In contrast, the plain ken finds 9693.385 reliable and authoritative (and, in a way, beautiful), while the deep ken sees 9693.385 as ugly and trivial.

We can think of the plain ken as having a kind of superstition regarding certain kinds of numbers. We would suggest that, for the plain ken, some numbers are problematic because they suggest a non-random process.

Let’s consider this pattern recognition problem, reconstructed from hazy memory of an exam I took unhappily in Grade 3.

What is the next item in the sequence 2, 4, 6, 8, ...?

(A) 10

(B) 4

...

The “correct” answer is (A). It envisions a sequence of even numbers: 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, ... I suggest that (B) is an equally correct answer, with the correct



sequence being 2, 4, 6, 8, 4, 3, 3, ... Most people might say that the “correct” pattern is regular, and that mine is incorrect because it is random. One definition of random is in fact “not being expressible in a concise formula.” The “correct” sequence can be expressed as a formula:  $2n$ , for  $n=1, 2, 3...$

Actually, there is also a pattern in my apparently irregular sequence as well. Each number represents the number of letters in each word starting with the verse Luke 1:51 in the King James Version of the Bible:

He (2) hath (4) shewed (6) strength (8) with (4) his (3) arm (3)...

The question tests how well a third-grader understands the mind of someone who designs grade-three examinations. This may be a valuable skill, but it does not test Truth, unlike a question like  $2+2=?$ . Given any randomness, it’s possible to find a pattern if you expand what “counts” as a pattern. Whether a pattern “counts” as true/natural/beautiful is a subjective question of aesthetic simplicity.

When mathematicians refer to “randomness,” they really are talking about *apparent* randomness.<sup>9</sup> “Random,” for our purposes, means any pattern beyond our ken. “Randomness,” like “chance” and “fortune,” might be used to explain an event or to assert that the event cannot be explained. The deep ken, which sees farther, has a higher threshold for randomness—what the plain ken sees as random, the deep ken might find meaningful. The deep ken might see coherence that the plain ken misses because the plain ken thinks everything is mostly random anyway. The deep ken sees no process as necessarily random, and so all numbers potentially have deep meaning.<sup>10</sup>

9 Gregory J. Chaitin, “Randomness and Mathematical Proof,” *Scientific American* 232 (1975): 47–53. In a way, “random” is an adverb: it cannot be applied to a number, but only to a process for reach a number. “Random number” is really a shorthand for “random[ly generated] number.” Steve Jobs made the iPod’s shuffle feature “less random to make it feel more random” (see Leonard Mlodinow, *Drunkard’s Walk: How Randomness Rules Our Lives* (New York: Pantheon, 2009), 175).

10 André Croucamp considers divination techniques as “information technology.” They introduce an element of (apparent) randomness into a set of symbols and then interpret the results in ways beyond normal mental patterns. For example, shuffling (randomness), distributing, revealing, and reading (interpretation) tarot cards has value for forcing the mind to consider associations and connections that it would not have come upon by following its normal mental ruts. He argues that the sympathetic nervous system “drives” thinking that “breaks the world into its constituent parts,” while the parasympathetic nervous system drives thinking that “connects things, sometimes on the basis of tenuous similarities. In this way associative thinking gives rise to symbols, metaphors and analogies. It also helps us find novel connections and unusual relationships between things.” This corresponds to at least some aspects of plain and deep kens, respectively. We would say that those deep-ken similarities need only be “tenuous” in the

Historically, as the plain ken gathered popularity, apparently random numbers became not a source of distress, but a sign of reliability. In the seventeenth century, for example, Far West scientists would collect measurements, and then publish their average. They saw the differences that occur in a set of measurements—perhaps 31.7, 32.4, 32.1, 31.8—as a sign of failure, so published 32, the average, rather than the shameful measurements themselves. This changed late in the eighteenth century, and today we have embraced the plain ken to the extent that these differences make the results feel genuine, not failed.<sup>11</sup>

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plain ken. Croucamp describes this as “random access to information in a non-linear system.” André Croucamp, “Traditional African Divination Systems as Information Technology,” 10–11, 14, [https://www.mindburstwork.com/sites/default/files/Traditional%20African%20divination%20systems%20as%20information%20technology\\_0.pdf](https://www.mindburstwork.com/sites/default/files/Traditional%20African%20divination%20systems%20as%20information%20technology_0.pdf)

11 Mlodinow, *Drunkard's Walk*, 127.



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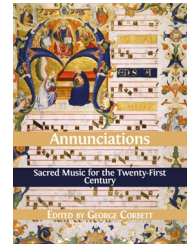
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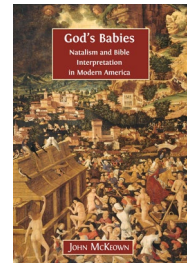


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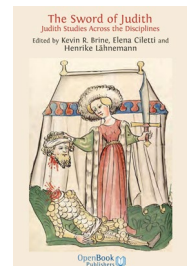


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