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the words of Jesus in John 6:40 “*For this is the will of my Father, that every one who sees the Son and believes in him should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.*” Dismas had been lost, but through Jesus Christ he was both found and saved.

THE ICONOGRAPHY OF THE CRUCIFIXION

The Crucifixion on what is now marked as Good Friday is replete with powerful imagery and symbolism. With the place of execution being on the outskirts of Jerusalem it was easily accessible for those who wanted to watch this grisly spectacle. Golgotha, sometimes known as Calvary (both words referring to the skull, more particularly the cranium – the skull-pan of the head) is believed to have been located a relatively short distance from the Jewish Temple. As an event the Crucifixion is the apotheosis of the New Testament and warrants close and careful analysis. From the four Canonical Gospels it is possible to work out some of the people who were present at the execution: Mary (mother of Jesus), Mary Magdalene³⁴, Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus, Salome (often identified as the wife of Zebedee), Mary of Clopas, Simon of Cyrene and a Disciple (historically believed to have been John, although this remains a matter of debate). Furthermore, it is possible to infer that the following were present: A Roman Centurion (possibly called Longinus)³⁵ along with Caiaphas and Annas, both High Priests. Four soldiers were assigned to carry out the execution, and of course

34 Mary Magdalene often appears *sub cruce* dressed in red with flowing hair. A fascinating read on this subject is: Bohde, D. (2019). Mary Magdalene at the Foot of the Cross: Iconography and the Semantics of Place. *Mitteilungen Des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*, 61(1), pp.3–44.

35 J. Ramsey Michaels asserts that the name of Longinus made its first appearance in the pseudo-Gospel of Nicodemus. Michaels, J. (1967). The Centurion's Confession and the Spear Thrust. *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 29(1), pp.102–109.

there were the three individuals to be put to death: Jesus of Nazareth and the two unnamed thieves. Jerusalem was exceptionally busy with visitors present for the Passover and so it is likely that quite a crowd of spectators would have gathered. Whilst some of those watching would have been full of vengeful satisfaction at the fact that Jesus was to be executed, others present were distraught at what was taking place. Anyone who has seen the 1964 film *Il vangelo secondo Matteo* (The Gospel According to St. Matthew)³⁶ by the Italian director Pier Paolo Pasolini will appreciate something of the highly charged emotions likely to have been on display at this harrowing event.

A journey to a crucifixion was a wretched one for the prisoners, the ugly nature of the scene and those participating in the spectacle being evoked with incredible intensity in the painting *Christ Carrying the Cross*, the precise artist for this work being unknown but believed to be by a follower of Hieronymous Bosch (dating from between 1500–1535). The condemned men had been forced to carry heavy rough-hewn wooden crosses through the city³⁷ and had now arrived at the place of their execution in the knowledge that what awaited them was to be a long drawn-out and excruciatingly painful death. There were the soldiers with paraphernalia to do the deed, as well as the usual swords and spears, for they had to be ever-ready lest a rescue attempt be made, they had whips, iron nails, hammers, axes, pincers, ladders, a crow-bar and iron mallet, as well as rope to help them hoist up the

36 Pasolini is believed to have chosen Matthew's Gospel as Jesus comes across as a more militant and political figure. The following academic paper is well worth reading in this regard: Mugnai, M. (2014). Pier Paolo Pasolini's "Mandatory Challenge": Jesus from "La ricotta" to "The Gospel According to Saint Matthew". *Italica*, 91(3), pp. 437–449.

37 Jesus's route to crucifixion is often commemorated in a series of images collectively known as the Stations of the Cross. His journey to execution is frequently described as taking place along the Via Dolorosa (Latin for 'Way of Grief' or 'Way of Sorrows').

crosses. Some artistic works spare the viewer little of the horror of the scene, with emphasis placed on the grimaces of those having their hands and feet transpierced with nails. Others seek to emphasise the crowd and focus on the primary reason that they were at Golgotha that day. Jörg Breu the Elder's *The Raising of the Cross* (1524) manages to capture the dramatic moment when Jesus is being hoisted up next to Dismas. Not all depictions feature the Latin Cross, a rather powerful painting of the Crucifixion of Christ known as the *Wiltern Crucifixion* (1453) by an unknown Tyrolean artist features T-shaped crosses, as well as including many of those depicted in the attire of the fifteenth century.

Historically artists and writers have portrayed a bleak, forbidding and rocky landscape, one that is desolate and devoid of hope. Artists in different parts of the world have drawn inspiration from local landscapes and climatic conditions to convey the scene, with Russell Drysdale's *Crucifixion* (1946) being heavily influenced by his experience of an extreme drought in New South Wales, Australia in 1944. Invariably the weather is used by artists to fit the mood, with doleful or angry skies darkening as the day progresses. This use of pathetic fallacy reminds the faithful that before the light of the Resurrection and Ascension must first come the utter blackness of the Crucifixion. Karel van Mander the Elder's *Landscape with snow and the Crucifixion* (1599), whilst using some poetic license in featuring snow skilfully manages to capture the stark and hostile nature of the locale.

The public execution of criminals was a common sight across the Roman Empire, but this one was different in view of the way that Jesus was perceived and treated. Pontius Pilate instructed that a *titulus* was nailed above Jesus's head, it read: INRI – the Latin inscription IESVS NAZARENVS REX IVDÆORVM (Jesus Nazarene, King of the Jews), which in English translates as “Jesus the Nazarene, King of the Jews”



6 Crucifixion (1946) – Russell Drysdale, Art Gallery NSW, Sydney, Australia. The artist has drawn heavily on his experience of a severe drought in Australia to convey the bleak and hostile nature of the landscape, which also seems appropriate as those crucified would have suffered terribly from dehydration. This post-war work has a post-apocalyptic feel to it.

(Matthew 27:37; Mark 15:26; Luke 23:38 and John 19:19). John's Gospel tells us that this superscription was written in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek (John 19:20). The film *The Passion of the Christ* (2004) endeavours to capture the multilingual aspect of the Crucifixion and the events that preceded it by using Hebrew, Latin, and reconstructed Aramaic. *Crucifixion* (1880) by Thomas Eakins is a *tour de force* of Realism, that not only reveals a thorough understanding of human physiology, it also manages to remain true to what is known of a crucifixion, such as the fact that four nails were used, rather than the three featured in many works of art. Many artists have opted for portraying Christ's crucifixion singly, or in the case of a work of 1912 by Jindřich Průcha with Jesus's cross given greater prominence, and the thieves set back, with one cross, presumably that of the Impenitent Thief as it



7 Landscape with snow and the Crucifixion (1599) – Karel van Mander, Private Collection. This panoramic Crucifixion is believed to have been based on an earlier work of 1517 by Lucas van Leyden and uses a Flemish winter snowscape to heighten the contrast between dark and light.

is on Christ's left, largely obscured. Down the ages there have been both stylised and realistic interpretations of the Crucifixion, some featuring the Crown of Thorns and a bloodied and bruised figure of Christ, others are pared down and minimalist in nature, sombre yet reverential, homing in on Jesus in his time of trial and tribulation.

The interplay of those present at the Crucifixion has been recorded in diverse ways. The contrast between Christ and those there to savour his humiliation has not been lost on artists, that said, it is difficult for most artists to capture the moment when Jesus said; *“Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.”* (Luke 23:34). In the visions of the Blessed Anne Catherine Emmerich (1774–1824) recorded in *The Dolorous Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ*³⁸, *“Dismas (the good thief) was silent but he was deeply moved at the prayer of Jesus for his enemies.”*³⁹

38 This work of piety has been the subject of some discussion around its provenance and authenticity.

39 Emmerich, A. *The Dolorous Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, Chapter XLII – Available at: www.ecatholic2000.com/anne/passion57.shtml [Accessed 24 March 2020]