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# Lamentation of Jesus

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# Lamentation of Jesus

I. Christianity, Literature, and Music
II. Judaism
III. Visual Arts
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## I. Christianity, Literature, and Music

**1. Scriptural Background.** Matthew 23:37–39 and Luke 13:34–35 show Jesus lamenting over Jerusalem, and elsewhere in the Gospels he is said explicitly to have *wept* over Lazarus' death (John 11:35) and over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41), and also, on the basis of Heb 5:7's allusion to his "loud cries and tears," it is often assumed that his expression of grief and agitation in Gethsemane involved weeping (Matt 26:37–38; Mark 14:33–34; cf. Luke 22:42). However, none of these scenes constitute what is conventionally called the "lamentation of Jesus [or of Christ]" (Ger.: Beweinung Christi); on the contrary, in the non-canonic scene known by that expression, Jesus is not the lamenter but rather the lamented. In the scene's iconography, popular from the 11th to the 19th century, the mourners around Jesus' cross-deposed corpse, the so-called lamentation group, tend to include the Virgin Mary, Mary Magdalene, Joseph of Arimathea, and often various combinations of other characters: St. John, other grieving persons, grieving angels, etc. (see Dillenberger; Lucchesi Palli/Hoffscholte; and below, "III. Visual Arts").

***a. Absence of Canonic Basis.*** Strictly speaking, there is no canonic basis for the lamentation of Jesus, and only in John's gospel are there two non-explicit statements on which later laments seem to be partly grounded: John 19:25–27 and 20:11, both of

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which involve Mary. In the former passage, during the crucifixion, she is standing near the cross, but not explicitly lamenting, with "her sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene," and the anonymous "disciple whom he loved." In the latter passage, after Jesus' death, Mary is alone, "weeping outside the tomb." In Luke 23 : 27–28's account of Jesus bearing his cross to Calvary, women of Jerusalem "beating their breasts and wailing for him" are mentioned, but Mary goes unmentioned.

Consistent with the fact that laments in most "traditional" cultures around the world are "usually performed by women" (Holst-Warhaft: 1), Jesus' mother Mary tends to figure the most prominently in the ways this scene has been imagined and depicted over the centuries – hence the immense popularity, from the Middle Ages on, of two thematically related motifs: one, in music and visual art alike, known (mainly in music) by the first two words of the medieval hymn, *Stabat mater dolorosa* (see below); the other, mainly in visuals arts, the German *Vesperbild*, known also by the Italian term pietà, which features the seated Virgin Mary, mourning her dead son, whose broken, wounded corpse she holds upon her lap (see, e.g., Emminghaus; and "Pietà").

***b. The Extension of Range in Literature and Music.*** Whereas representations of the lamentation of Jesus and the pietà in visual arts capture specific, essentially *frozen moments* in the immediate aftermath of Jesus' passion, occurring between the deposition from the cross, and the entombment (i.e., the thirteenth and fourteenth of the traditional Stations of the Cross), the media of literature and music are not restricted in that way, but are instead free to represent the lamenting of Jesus' torments and sufferings by his mother and any number of his other followers throughout the whole sequence of passion events – that is, leading up to, during, and after the crucifixion. As a ritual act, the traditional lament "objectively … is designed to honour and appease the dead, while subjectively, it gives expression to a wide range of conflicting emotions" (Alexiou: 55). Literary and musical representations of the lamentation of Jesus represent those same emotions, but extend the range of moments represented, as such representations not only depict the conflicted emotions elicited in his mother and other followers after his death, but also show the anguish and grief of those lamenters earlier on, essentially in their role as lamenters-to-be, as they witness the stages of his torments and sufferings leading up to and anticipating his death.

**2. Emergence, and Phases, of the Topos in the Gospel of Nicodemus.** During the first centuries of early Christianity, it seems likely that the church fathers condoned a popular confusion between Christ and the Greek vegetation-fertility god Adonis, whose annual "death" at harvest time prompted the singing of cultic laments, only to be followed in the spring by his "resurrection" (see Alexiou: 56-57).

The literary locus classicus of the explicit lamentation of Jesus is the apocryphal *Acts of Pilate*, which is inserted into the broader apocryphal *Gospel of Nicodemus*. There, the reported lamenting occurs in three phases: before, during, and after the crucifixion. First, after Pilate's pronouncement of Jesus' death sentence, as Jesus (or, then, Simon of Cyrene) is bearing the cross to Calvary, John rushes to inform Jesus' mother, referred to as the *theotokos* (θεοτόκος, "god-bearer," or more loosely, "mother of God"; see "Theotokos"). Her immediate response is to cry out loudly, rise up "as if blinded [or darkened]," and go weeping along the road, followed by "Martha, and Mary Magdalene, and Salome," as well as John. (Cf. Matt 27 : 55–56; Mark 15 : 40–41; and John 19 : 25–26, which collectively place Jesus' mother, Mary Magdalene, and Salome, as well as Mary, the wife of Zebedee, albeit not Martha, at the crucifixion site, but make no mention of their laments.) Upon joining the crowd and beholding her son crowned with thorns, and with hands bound, Jesus' mother faints and falls unconscious to ground. There she lies for some time before reviving and tearing her face with her nails and beating her breast while "lamenting and crying" only to be driven from the road by "the Jews," whom she berates as "lawless" (*Gos. Nic.* 10; *ANF* 8 : 429–30).

The second phase of lamentation in the *Gos. Nic.* 10 occurs while Jesus is on the cross. In effect the text incorporates and elaborates upon Jesus' words to Mary at John 19 : 26–27. Whereas Mary never speaks beneath the cross in John's gospel, here she cries out loudly, addressing Jesus as her son. This outburst catches his attention and elicits his quoted Johannine declaration to her and John, "the disciple whom he loved standing beside her" (John 19 : 26), who here is named – as he will conventionally be in later accounts. There follows a lengthy account of her continued lamentation, including several anti-Jewish motifs consistent with those introduced in the first phase:

> And she wept much, saying: For this I weep, my son, because thou sufferest unjustly, because the lawless Jews have delivered thee to a bitter death. Without thee, my son, what will become of me?… Where are thy disciples, who boasted that they would die with thee?… Bend down, O cross, that I may bid farewell to my son like a mother. The Jews, hearing these words, … drove to a distance both her and the women and John. (*Gos. Nic.* 10; *ANF* 6 : 430)

The third lamentation phase occurs significantly later (*Gos. Nic.* 11), after the crucifixion, at the site of the entombment, where Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus, the *theotokos*, Mary Magdalene, Salome, together with John and some other unnamed women, are gathered together, having prepared Jesus' corpse in white linen and buried it. (Cf. Matt


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27 : 57–61; Luke 23 : 50–56; Mark 15 : 42–47; and John 19 : 38–42, which collectively locate Joseph of Arimathea, Mary Magdalene, as well as Mary, the wife of Zebedee, and other unnamed Galilean women at the tomb at the time of burial.) This time, the weeping and lamenting, and the attacking against the Jews, are done not only by the *theotokos* ("How am I not to lament thee, my son? … Who shall put a stop to my tears, my sweetest son? … [etc.]") but also by the "weeping" Magdalene: "Hear, O peoples, tribes, and tongues, and learn what death the lawless Jews have delivered him… Who will let these things be heard by all the world? I shall go alone to Rome, to the Caesar. I shall show him what evil Pilate hath done in obeying the lawless Jews." Joseph, too, now laments: "Ah, me! sweetest Jesus…. How shall I enshroud thee? How shall I entomb thee?" (*Gos. Nic.* 11; *ANF* 8 : 431).

**3. Byzantine Developments.** Known as the *Stabat* of antiquity, perhaps the first poem to exploit the theme of the Virgin's lamentations is the one ascribed traditionally, though debatably (see Nichols: 77n. 24), to Ephrem the Syrian (306–373 CE), which is chanted at Vespers on Holy Saturday in the Syrian rite. The opening reads:

> Mary approached Jesus,
> And leaned her head against the cross.
> She began to murmur, in Hebrew,
> Lamentations, words of sadness,
> "Who will transform me, my son, into an eagle,
> So that I might fly to the four corners of the world,
> And invite and lead all the nations
> To the grand feast of your death?" (My rendering, from the French translation in Khouri-Sarkis: 203)

Ephrem's sermon, "The Lamentations of the Most glorious Virgin Mother Mary," quotes her at length as she is pictured "standing next to the cross …, examining carefully the direst wounds, and seeing the nails, complaints, blows to the cheeks, and scourges," and crying out "in grief with great wailing, and loud lamentations [*magno cum planctu, lamentisque dolore plenis*]" (Ephrem: 279).

The counterpart in the Orthodox liturgical text, the *Triodion* (τριώδιον), recited as part of the vespers service on Holy Friday, describes the Virgin as she sees her son on the cross:

> and with a mother's love she wept and bitterly her heart was wounded. She groaned in anguish from the depth of her soul, and in her grief she struck her face and tore her hair. And, beating her breast, she cried lamenting: "Woe is me, my divine Child!… Why dost Thou vanish from my sight, O Lamb of God?" (*The Lenten Triodion*: 612)

The early 6th-century poet and saint, Romanos the Melodist, devoted an entire one of his Greek kontákia or chanted sermons to the Virgin Mary's "lament" (see also "Romanos the Melodist"; "Kontakion"). Sung in the fourth plagal, this kontákion consists of a three-verse prelude followed by seventeen nine-verse stanzas, most commonly entitled by the manuscripts "On the Lament of the Mother of God." This is (according to Tsironis: 575) the first known dialogue between Jesus and Mary on the way to Calvary (stanza 1–16), and, as such, is followed by a closing eulogy of Christ by the poet (stanza 17). Yet most editors have called this hymn "Mary at the Cross," presumably because the prelude invites all to "praise him who was crucified for us,/ for Mary looked upon him on the Tree and said,/ 'Though you endure the Cross, yet you are *my Son and my God*'" (Romanos 1994: 143; italics in Lash's translation; for Lash's commentary on the title, see ibid.: 252).

Here, the Virgin reacts "not as a woman … divinely inspired, but as an ordinary woman of the people" (Alexiou: 63). She is the only quoted lamenter, and her words are saturated with biblical allusions – for example:

> As she saw her own lamb being dragged to slaughter [cf. Isa 53 : 7],
> Mary, the ewe-lamb, worn out with grief followed
> with other women, crying out,
> "Where are you going, my child? For whose sake are you completing the course [cf. 2 Tim 4 : 7] so fast?
> Is there once again another wedding in Cana? [cf. John 2 : 1–11] [….]
> Even now the road still filled with palms
> reveals to all the acclamations of the lawless for you [cf. Matt 21 : 8–9, 15–16]. […]
> Peter is not going with you, he who said,
> 'I will never deny you, even though I die.' [Matt 26 : 35]" ("Mary at the Cross" ["On the Lament of the Mother of God"] 1.1–5; 2.5–6; 3.2–3; in Romanos 1967 : 160–63; 1994 : 143–44)

Another formative contributor to the development of the lamentation-of-Jesus tradition was the poet and preacher Germanos (ca. 634–ca. 733) of Constantinople, where he served as patriarch from 715 to 730. His few writings that survive include a *Homily on the corporeal burial of Our Lord* (Λόγος εἰς τὴν θεόσωμον ταφὴν τοῦ Κυρίου; *PG* 98 : 244B–289B), the bulk of which is devoted to Mary's lament, which Tsironis finds reminiscent of Ephrem's *Stabat* inasmuch as Mary, in her address to Jesus, expects no response (Tsironis: 576).

George of Nicodemia (fl. ca. 860), who knew both Germanos' homily and Romanos' kontakion on the Virgin's lament, takes up the topos in an homily of his own on Good Friday, the first extant homily by any author that treats that subject from a mariological perspective, following the crucifixion events through Mary's own eyes (as noted by Tsironis: 573). An extensive elaboration on John 19 : 25


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("standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, [etc.]"), the homily includes the detail of Mary's expressed desire to alleviate the suffering of the crucified Jesus by dying in his place (*Or*. 8, *PG* 100 : 1457A–89D, here 1472B). The homily devotes its last portion to Jesus' deposition and burial, employing both monologue and dialogue.

The lament of the Virgin reaches its most extreme point of despair in a *planctus* (plaint, lament) by Symeon Metaphrastes (second half of 10th cent.) in which she expresses a desire for suicide, and her protestation that if her son abandons her, she will be alone on earth, without kin or friends (*PG* 114: 209–17, here 213B). This detail recurs in a later vernacular Greek θρῆνος Θεοτόκου, and comparable motifs were present in the homiletic tradition prior to Symeon: e.g., in addition to her above-cited desire, expressed at the foot of the cross in George's homily, to die in Jesus' place, the Virgin lamenting at her son's tomb in Germanos' *Homily on the corporeal burial of Our Lord* wishes that she could have died with him (Germanos: *PG* 98: 272A). Unsurprisingly, as Margaret Alexiou points out, the motif of the Virgin's suicide wish introduced in Symeon's *planctus*

> was not developed in the *kontákia*, which tended to reflect more official Orthodox doctrine; but it has remained an important motif in many of the modern [Greek] folk ballads, where it provokes the reply from Christ that if his Mother gives way to suicide and despair, there can be no salvation for the rest of the world – a point which Romanos and later hymn writers do not omit to elaborate at some length (Romanos 19.6 …). (Alexiou: 65; see also 220 n.28)

**4. Western Developments.** In the West, the motif of the lamentation of Jesus underwent separate developments that are quite distinct from the Eastern tradition, even while displaying significant similarities with it. The Latin liturgical commemorations of Jesus' passion, as they can be traced back at least to the 9th century, including the veneration of the cross with its somber *improperia*, form a liturgical background for the development of the Marian laments in the West, although actual Marian laments are only known from the 12th century (see also "Planctus Mariae"). From the 10th century on, deposition ceremonies constituted liturgical mourning ceremonies in the form of a burial procession for Jesus (see "Burial of Jesus VI. Music"). Anselm of Canterbury in the 11th century (in his Prayer to Christ) asked, "Why, O my soul, were you not there to be pierced by a sword of bitter sorrow […]. Why did you not share the sufferings of the most pure virgin […]?" (see "Emotions VIII. Music"). Anselm's focus on the Virgin's compassion as a model for Christians is expressive of what has been perceived as a turn from the "Romanesque" to the "Gothic," which came to full expression in the 12th century, not least in the theology of Bernard of Clairvaux (see Southern). In the second half of that same century, as Alexiou observes, the lament of the Virgin emerged in both Latin and the vernacular, "when it was elaborated in the Passion Plays and as a separate lyrical piece" (Alexiou: 220n. 35, which includes further references).

Two of the most significant developments in the Western treatment of the lamentation-of-Jesus topos during the 13th and 14th centuries are marked by the composition of the so-called *Stabat mater dolorosa* poem, and of the text entitled the *Meditationes vitae Christi* (*Meditations on the Life of Christ*).

One of the most influential Western crystallizations of her lament is the *Stabat mater dolorosa*. Consisting of twenty three-verse stanzas, and attributed to Pope Innocent III (d. 1216), St. Bonaventure (1221–74), or (more often) Jacopone da Todi (1230–1306), among other authors, the poem "is at any rate considered to be of 13th-century Franciscan origin" (Caldwell/Boyd; see also the preface to "Stabat Mater dolorosa"). The opening stanza takes its first two lines, and hence the hymn's title, from John 19 : 25, Vg. (*Stabant autem juxta crucem Jesu mater ejus, et soror matris ejus,…* [Now there stood by the cross of Jesus, his mother, and his mother's sister,…]):

> Stabat Mater dolorosa
> iuxta Crucem lacrimosa,
> dum pendebat Filius.
>
> (The mother, full of sorrow, stood/ weeping, close to the cross,/ during the whole time [her] son was hanging. ["Stabat Mater dolorosa," from which hereafter all translations are mine])

Further based on Simeon's prophecy that a sword would pierce Jesus' mother's soul (compare stanza 2 to Luke 2 : 35), the hymn describes Mary's distress at the torment of her crucified son (stanzas 2–4) and poses the question of who, upon beholding her, could not weep or share her pain (stanzas 5–6). The poet then entreats Mary to pierce his own heart with her son's wounds (stanza 11), before asking her to let him join her in lamenting and in experiencing her son's wounds:

> Iuxta Crucem tecum stare,
> et tibi sociare
> in planctu desidero. […]
> Fac me plagis vulnerari,
> fac me Cruce inebriari,
> et cruore Filii.
>
> (To stand with you close to the cross,/ and to join with you/ in wailing [or lamentation], I yearn. […] Make me wounded by the blows,/ make me inebriated by the cross,/ and by the son's blood. [Stanza 14])

As painful as these emotions are in the *Stabat mater*, the poem emphasizes, as Alexiou notes, "the Virgin's patience and fortitude," which is "essentially different" from her more violent, at times even suicidal expressions of grief in the Greek laments (Alexiou: 68).


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"Well known to all classes by the end of the fourteenth century" (Henry), *Stabat mater dolorosa* was used liturgically in the Roman Church as both a sequence, from the 15th century on, and an Office hymn. By 1700, numerous composers, John Browne and Palestrina among them, had set the hymn to music. From 1700 to 1883, over 100 composers are listed as having set it, including Scarlatti (1715–19), Pergolesi (ca. 1736), Mozart (K33c, 1766; now lost), Haydn (1767), Rossini (1841), Dvořák (1877), and Liszt (part of his *Christus oratorio*, 1862–67), to name only some of the more renowned. Subsequent composers who set it include, most notably, Verdi (1898), Szymanowski (1925–6), Lennox Berkeley's (1947) and Poulenc (1950) (Henry; Caldwell/Malcolm).

The *Meditations on the Life of Christ* (*Meditationes vitae Christi*), in which the grief of the lamenting Virgin, if not "violent," nonetheless matches the depth of that displayed by her in the Greek texts, was spuriously ascribed to Bonaventure but is now thought by many to have been written around 1300 by John of Caulibus, a Franciscan of Tuscany (see, e.g., John of Caulibus 2000: xiii-xxiv; Baker: 86). Widely popular, and a landmark in Franciscan ascetic meditation and "affective spirituality," this work is designed "to stir an emotional response to the events of Christ's life" (Baker: 87).

A leitmotif running through the book's last quarter, which circulated autonomously as *Meditationes de passione Domini* (*Meditations on the Lord's Passion*; see Baker: 84), is the serial lamenting in which the Virgin (above all) and others engage as they follow Jesus along the via dolorosa, beginning when the Virgin, John, and some companions are "overcome by an anguish … indescribably great" at seeing Jesus being led by a raucous crowd to Pilate (John of Caulibus 2000: 246 [ch. 76]). From the start, the reader is instructed to "contemplate and consider carefully each and every one of those events" so as to "suffer deeply with them" (ibid.). Subsequent vignettes of lamentation include Mary being "stricken half-dead in her anguish" when seeing Jesus bearing the cross outside the city gate (ibid.: 250 [ch. 77]), and her being "saddened beyond measure, and embarrassed" at seeing him naked prior to his crucifixion (ibid.: 252 [ch. 78]). A recurrent, related motif is what might be characterized as *the reciprocity of suffering* between mother and son: e.g., during the crucifixion itself, where "his most sorrowful mother['s] … own suffering greatly increased her son's suffering, as his did hers. Virtually she was hanging on the cross with her son; and" – cf. some of the afore-discussed Greek texts – "she would have chosen rather to die with him than live on" (ibid.: 254 [ch. 78]). Also, wherever possible, the narrative links the images of suffering and lamentation with biblical texts:

> His mother *stood by the cross* [John 19 : 25] of her son…. [S]he was devastated as she poured her heart out in prayer for him….In turn, her son prayed … "My father,… You see her *desolate, afflicted with deep sorrow all the day long* [Lam 1 : 13]. I entrust her to You, to make her sorrows bearable."
>
> *Near the cross* [John 19 : 25] with our Lady were John and the Magdalene, and our Lady's two sisters, Mary the mother of James and Salome. All of them … were shaken with sobs and could not be consoled …; they felt deep sorrow for their Lord and Lady and for one other. (John of Caulibus: 254, 255 [ch. 78])

Further, when Jesus said from the cross, "I thirst" (John 19 : 28), his mother and companions evince "great suffering," and, when he at last commended his spirit to his "Father" and "breathed his last" (Luke 23 : 46), the Virgin "became like a person rendered senseless or half-dead," and his "friends" Magdalene, John, and the others, "*were replete with bitterness*, filed with sorrows, *drunk with wormwood* [Lam 3 : 15]" (John of Caulibus: 255, 256 [ch. 78]).

The *Meditations on the Life of Christ* dwells at some length upon the lamenting by his mother, her two sisters, John, and Magdalene as Jesus' corpse hangs on the cross and has its side pierced by Longinus – an act that causes the Virgin to collapse "half-dead," and, when revived, to feel herself "pierced with a deadly sorrow" (in fulfillment of Luke 2 : 35's prophecy) at the sight of the wound. When those five are then joined by the arrival of other followers of Jesus, including Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, the group engages at length in "loud lamentation" (John of Caulibus: 258 [ch. 79]), which, after the body's ensuing removal from the cross, leads into what is in effect the paradigmatic narrative presentation of the lamentation-of-Jesus scene, following the body's placement on the ground, whose representations in visual art became conventionalized from the 11th century on:

> With the disciples around her, our Lady cradled his head on her lap; and Magdalene his feet, where once she had won so much grace [see Luke 7 : 36–50, where the anonymous woman is traditionally identified with Magdalene]. The others all stood around and all loudly raised their lamentation over him [cf. Acts 8 : 2]: for they all mourned him most bitterly [cf. Ezek 27 : 31–32), as if he were a first-born son [cf. Zec 12 : 10]. (John of Caulibus 2000: 260 [ch. 79]).

Here, notably, the representation of the communal lamentation includes within it the more private details of two other separate topoi: the *pietà* ("our Lady cradled his head…") and Magdalene cradling his feet – as she does, e.g., in Giotto's *Lamentation* fresco in the Scrovegni Chapel (ca. 1305), Padua; and Gerard David's painting of the same scene (ca. 1515–1520), Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Consistent with the third and last of the above-discussed phases of the lamentation of Jesus introduced in the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, the lamenting of Jesus in the *Meditations on the Life of Christ* by all present not only persists throughout the wrapping of his body and is "renewed" as that task is repeated


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and the body is about to be entombed (see ibid.: 261–63 [ch. 80]; quote at 262).

Over two centuries after the composition of the *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, the mental image of the Virgin's lamentation was incorporated into the meditation on the mysteries of Jesus' life prescribed by Ignatius of Loyola in the fourth week of his *Spiritual Exercises* (*Exercitia spiritualia*, 1522–24). There, the first point in contemplating Jesus' removal from the cross is that "He was taken down … by Joseph [of Arimathea] and Nicodemus in the presence of His sorrowful mother" (*en presencia de su Madre dolorosa* [autographum] = *in conspectu ipso Matris afflictissimae* [versio vulgata]; Ignatius: 362 [§ 298]; ET: 122).

Surely it is in part a testimony to the widespread impact of Ignatian spirituality that, at the height of the Counter-Reformation, a member of Catholic society would hardly have needed to be a Jesuit to join the mother and followers of Jesus imaginatively in lamenting his passion and death. From the 16th through 18th century, as Robert L. Kendrick reminds us, ceremonies of mourning and weeping were part of social reenactments – including also processions, "entombments of Christ," and depositions from the cross – in which early modern Catholics annually engaged during the ritually jampacked seventy-two hours of prayer and penitence between the afternoons of Wednesday and Saturday of Holy Week: "This dialectic between mourning and the internalization of remorse was vital for the Week's meaning" (Kendrick: 2). In the Tenebrae service, the accompanying music and singing were largely grounded in biblical texts: e.g., each of the three Nocturnes, the sections sung at Matins, began with three psalms, and the First Nocturne consisted of verses from *Threni*, i.e., the book of Lamentations, traditionally (though incorrectly) attributed to Jeremiah (ibid.: 3). The Tenebrae was construed varyingly by different interpretive traditions: e.g., by one, as the "funeral of Christ," and thus linked to the *planctus* set; by another, as serving through its texts, especially Lamentations, to catalogue human sin that had made the passion necessary for salvation; by yet another, as a moral-penitential experience of *metanoia*, renouncing sin, as is most manifest in the Miserere (i.e., Ps 50: *miserere mei Deus*… [v. 3; have mercy on me, O God]), recited invariably at the start of Lauds (ibid.: 6; see also 4).

Read typologically, the terrifying destruction bemoaned in Lamentations established a tone evocative of *compassio*, "literally suffering the Passion together with Christ" (ibid.: 29), and it was in this spirit that Tenebrae works, i.e., the Lamentations and Responsories alike, were composed. For example, in 1588, the Cremonese composer Marc'Antonio Ingegneri, commenting on his own Responsories, "which the Church uses to lament the death of Christ our Lord," attested that

> I, together with my singers in our basilica … might be brought to weep, along with the angels who once bitterly mourned the death of Christ …, and with the Church commemorating His terrible death with tears and mourning at its proper time, namely these sad and holy Days; in doing so, I could sing with the angels. (Quoted in ibid.: 30)

With the lamentation of Jesus so fixedly institutionalized in the ecclesiastical liturgy, calendar, and tradition, it is hardly surprising that it should register among the passion scenes the German mystic Anna Katherina Emmerich (1774–1824) claims to have envisioned in exacting detail. As Joseph and Nicodemus prepared to mount the ladders to depose Jesus' body from the cross, she records,

> All were deeply affected, and their hearts overflowing with sorrow and love; … Nothing broke the stillness save an occasional smothered word of lamentation, or stifled groan [ein heisses Wehklagen oder Seufzen], which escaped from one or other of these holy personages, in spite of their earnest eagerness and deep attention to their pious labour. Magdalen gave way unrestrainedly to her sorrow, and neither the presence of so many different persons, nor any other consideration, appeared to distract her from it. When the body was taken down it was wrapped in linen … and then placed in the arms of the Blessed Virgin, who, overwhelmed with sorrow and love [mit Schmerz und Sehnsucht; lit. sorrow and yearning], stretched them forth to receive their precious burden.
>
> No precaution had been neglected which could in any way facilitate to her – the Mother of Sorrows [ermüdeten Mutter; lit. weary or worn-out mother] – in her deep affliction of soul, the mournful but most sacred duty which she was about to fulfil…. The adorable head of Jesus rested upon Mary's knee, and his body was stretched upon a sheet. The Blessed Virgin was overwhelmed with sorrow and love. (Emmerich 1875: 318–19, 320 [ch. 20], 321 [ch. 21, sec. 1]; 1914: 284, 285 [ch. 50], 286 [ch. 51])

Of the fourteen Stations of the Cross recognized from the 17th century to the present day, the deposition (i.e., the taking of Jesus down from the cross) or the lamentation (of his corpse lain upon the ground) has constituted the thirteenth station. In the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, Jerusalem, the very spot where the deposition/lamentation of Jesus is believed by the faithful to have occurred is marked by a reddish marble stone slab called "the Holy Unction," which flocks of pilgrims daily kneel to kiss. This slab allegedly covers the site where Jesus' body was laid and wrapped after its removal from the cross. A large mosaic on the wall behind the slab depicts the scene, the Ἐπιτάφιος, showing Jesus' mother and others lamenting over the supine corpse, and beside the slab is the spot where she is believed to have fainted (e.g., Dadrian: 288; see also "Church of the Holy Sepulchre").

While the principle of *sola scriptura* would have released strict Protestants from obeisance to the non-canonic lamentation-of-Jesus topos per se, they were certainly not prevented from placing them-


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selves imaginatively in the role of lamenters at the crucifixion. In his hymn "When I survey the wondrous cross," the English Nonconformist theologian and hymnist Isaac Watts (1674–1748) situates himself – or, more specifically, anyone who sings this hymn – back in time, as an observer and lamenter present on Calvary:

When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride. (Watts: stanza 1)

As the sight of "His blood" (stanza 2, line 4) and of his "dying crimson" renders the lamenting hymnist "dead to all the globe,/ And all the globe … dead to me" (stanza 3, lines 1, 3–4), the hymnist urges "all the ransomed race" to join "Forever and forevermore" in praising "Christ, who won for sinners grace/ By bitter grief and anguish sore" (stanza 6).

The Protestant tradition of the *historia* (see "Historia [Music]," including not least the oratorio Passion, culminating with J. S. Bach's *Passions*, gave rise to musical representations that also included lamentations over Jesus: e.g., the aria (no. 61) of the *St. Matthew Passion*, "Können Tränen meiner Wangen" (If the tears of my cheeks), as well as the concluding chorus (no. 78), "Wir setzen uns mit Tränen nieder" ("With tears we sit down"; Marissen: 61, 71–72). Numerous other more or less similar lamentations of Jesus' passion are also found in other oratorio Passions, in Passion oratorios, and cantatas (e.g., the tradition *Tod Christi* cantatas in the 18th century; see "Empfindsamkeit").

Of modern literary adaptations of the lamentation-of-Jesus topos, arguably the most poignant example occurs in a Yiddish novel written from a Jewish perspective: Sholem Asch's *The Nazarene* (see below "II. Judaism").

**5. Folk Expressions.** Popular and folk manifestations of the lamentation of Jesus vary from one culture to another in their particular thematic points of emphasis. In Poland, for example, expressive of the nation's longstanding popular Catholic self-identity as the Christ of Nations (see "Christ, National Images of 1. Poland, 'Christ of Nations'"), the lamentation-of-Jesus motif bears a special resonance that naturally dovetails with the equally deep-seated embrace of the Virgin Mary as Poland's patron saint and "Queen." For example, a popular Polish anonymous poem of the 15th century, *Posluchajcie, bracia mila* (Listen, Dear Brothers), a.k.a. the *Żale Matki Boskiej pod krzyżem* (Laments of the Mother of God Under the Cross) or *Lament świętokrzyski* (The Holy Cross Lament), depicts Mary's grief at witnessing her son's crucifixion (cf. John 19 : 25–27). According to Margaret Ziolkowski, this work and others like it "contributed to the development of a pervasive West Slavic folk fascination with the travails of Mary, a fascination that later expressed itself in a massive number of folk lyrics" (Ziolkowski: 235). Another prominent, even earlier example is the *Ómagyar Mária-siralom*, the so-called Old Hungarian Lamentations of Mary, dating from ca. 1300, the oldest surviving poem composed in Hungarian.

As late as 1976, the *Lament świętokrzyski* could inspire the Polish composer Henryk Górecki in creating his three-movement Symphony No. 3, op. 36 for soprano and orchestra, popularly called *Symphony of Sorrowful Songs* (*Symfonia pieśni żalosnych*). A portion of the *Lament świętokrzyski* provides the text of the Symphony's first movement, followed, in the second movement, by the actual prayer to Mary inscribed in 1944 by eighteen-year-old Helena Wanda Blazusiakowna on the wall of the Gestapo cell in which she was imprisoned in Zakopane. The Symphony's final movement sets a folk-song in the dialect of the Opole region, from the time of the insurrections of Silesian Poles against German rule (1919–1921), in which a mother laments the death of her son "killed by the harsh enemy [złe wrogi zabiły]" – i.e., while fighting for the Polish cause. Here, as noted by Marek Mariusz Tytko (via personal communication), the dirge is not alluding to Mary and her own dead son but expressing "the universal sense of this situation of human suffering" (see also "Górecki, Henryk Mikołaj").

The motif of mourning Jesus' crucifixion also resonates deeply with the experience of suffering in African American spirituals. Like the singer of Watts' "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross" (see above), singers of the spiritual "Were You There?" attest to their own highly emotional, "trembling" response to the crucifixion scene:

Were you there when they crucified my Lord? (were you there?)
Were you there when they crucified my Lord?
Oh! – Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.
Were you there when they crucified my Lord? (Quoted by Campbell: 90)

Following a simple melody, most of the words are repeated in each verse, though the clause "crucified my Lord" in later verses is replaced by "nailed him to the tree," "pierced him in the side," "when the sun refused to shine," and "laid him in the grave" (ibid.: 91).

**6. Distinctive Regional Practices.** As Gail Holst-Warhaft has shown, the conceptualization and ritualization of the lamentation of Jesus, particularly his mother's role as lamenter, have varied from region to region, adapting or conforming to those regions' distinctive traditions of lament. For example, in Greece, where the early church developed its own form of ritual mourning to replace the pagan Bacchanalian lament, the official laments sung by choirs at ecclesiastically sanctioned funerals were followed by the Christian form of ἐπιτάφιος λόγος


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(funeral oration), a speech praising the dead, and the term ἐπιτάφιος θρῆνος (lamentation on the grave) was applied to the particular funeral central to the new religion, Jesus' funeral service, part of whose litany involves the Virgin's lament over her dead son. The tradition portrays her "as weeping *dakrious thrēnous* (tearful laments) for the dead Christ" (Holst-Warhaft: 171).

The lamenting Virgin Mary was also distinctively portrayed in rural Ireland, which had an indigenous tradition of lamenting or "keening" women, some of them semi-professionals, others relatives of the dead, who sang extended, improvised laments, called "caoineadh," and were associated with madness. Known as "bean chointe," these lamenting women were depicted with disheveled hair, disheveled clothes, and bare feet:

> In an interesting parallel with Greek folk lament, the Virgin is portrayed in Irish tradition as a typical wailing woman with loosened hair and bare feet who leaps and even drinks blood. The motifs used to depict mourning women, motifs extended to the lamenting Virgin Mary, also characterize the behavior of *geilt* or madmen. (Holst-Warhaft: 27–28; quote on 28)

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## II. Judaism

The Bible-related but extra-canonic lamentation of Jesus, though a definitively Christian topos (see above, "I. Christianity, Literature, and Music"), has not gone without approximate representations in Jewish literature over the centuries. The following two examples range from negative to positive in their presentation of the topos, and differ as to when, among the sequential stages of Jesus' passion, they depict the lamenting as taking place.

An early Jewish treatment of the topos occurs in the medieval anti-Christian pseudo-account of Jesus' life, *Toledot Yeshu* (The generations of Jesus, in English a.k.a. The Life Story of Jesus), where the lamenting of the plight of Yeshu (Jesus) by his "disciples," called also "the villains," is represented in a pair of cameo-like passages – one of them just before, and the other, just after, his death. As recounted here, Yeshu was seized and held on Pesach (Passover) by "the sages" in the temple, where his followers were making obeisance to him (Strasbourg BnU 3974, 172 v.28 in Meerson/Schäfer: 1 : 176 [=2 : 91]). During the ensuing interrogation, as it became clear that his fate was sealed, "Then the villains started crying but they could not save him" (Strasbourg BnU 3974, 173 r.12–13 in Meerson/Schäfer: 1 : 177 [=2 : 91]). After his consequent execution (by hanging on a cabbage stalk) and burial, a scene occurs that is analogous to the standard medieval Christian lamentation, only here Yeshu's lamenters, all of them anonymous, are cast in a decidedly negative light:

> When some villains of his people were crying on his grave, some young men of Israel passed by them (and) said to them in Aramaic, "Why are you sitting (here), you fools, let us open the grave, it is doubtful!" (Strasbourg BnU 3974, 173 r.24–26 in Meerson/Schäfer: 1 : 51 [=2 : 92])

(For variant representations of the disciples lamenting Yeshu's trial, execution, and burial in other manuscripts of *Toledot Yeshu*, see, e.g., New York JTX 2221, 41 v.11–12, 27–31, in Meerson/Schäfer:

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1 : 199–200 [=2 : 107–8]; Parma 2091 [De Rossi 1271], 66 v.29, in Meerson/Schäfer: 1 : 280 [2 : 204]; Cambridge, MA, Harvard Houghton Lib. 57, 25v.9, 17 in Meerson/Schäfer: 1 : 299–300 [=2 : 231]; Princeton Firestone Library Heb. 28, 12v.8, 16–17 in Meerson/Schäfer: 1 : 360 [=2 : 300–1].)

The lamentation topos could not be treated more differently in *The Nazarene* (*Der man fun Notseres*, 1939), by the Yiddish author, Sholem Asch (1880–1957), a novel whose fictionalized retelling of Jesus' life alienated Asch from his Jewish readership. In contrast to *Toledot Yeshu*'s disparaging portrayal of Jesus, Asch strives in his novel, as Ben Siegel puts it, "for nothing less than the reconciling of Jewish and Christian 'differences'" by "emphasizing the essential 'Jewishness' of Jesus' ethical principles" (Siegel: 137). Asch's Yeshua (Jesus) is portrayed sympathetically as a Jewish rabbi, prophet, and "saint" of whose murder the Jews are shown to have been absolutely innocent, and "Edom" (i.e., Rome), solely guilty (e.g., Asch: 672). Thus Asch not only highlights the lamentation topos but innovatively expands it to encompass a series of several scenes.

The first of these scenes, which takes place prior to the unfolding of the passion events, surprisingly focuses upon Yeshua's betrayer, Judah Ish-Kiriot (Judas Iscariot), as a lamenter. Judah's act of anticipatory keening is witnessed and reported by the narrator, Jochanon, a pupil of Rabbi Nicodemon, himself an ardent admirer of Yeshua. "In the night I was awakened by a lamentation," recalls Jochanon, remembering what were evidently the moments when Judah, overwhelmed by his own impatience for the messiah's advent, feels irrevocably compelled to betray Yeshua.

> But it was not the weeping which comes with the tears of the eyes, but rather the weeping which comes with the tears of the heart. The voice was like the mourning of a jackal in the wilderness…. I saw Judah … mingled with the shadows of the night, … and he wept, and spoke to himself: "Father in heaven, why hast Thou chosen me alone from among all to be the accursed one?" (Ibid.: 583)

The first two scenes involving more conventional lamentation of Jesus' plight, both again described by Jochanon, are the vignette of "high, nasal wailing of funeral lamentations from … the women" who are present outside the Procuratorium from which the bloody and quivering Yeshua emerges and sets out bearing his cross (ibid.: 662); and, later, when Rufus – a friend of Jochanon and a fellow pupil of Rabbi Nicodemon – "burst into the room [in Nicomedon's home] with a loud lamenting and fell on my Rabbi's neck" (ibid.: 669).

In the latter scene, the lamenting Rufus had just returned from witnessing the crucifixion, and Nicodemon asked him to recount what he had seen. Rufus' ensuing report, long and detailed, includes a vignette that loosely corresponds to Mark 15 : 40–41 (cf. Matt 27 : 55–56) and John 19 : 25–26, which together locate Mary Magdalene, Jesus' mother Mary, and Salome (construed by some as Zebedee's wife) in the scene of the crucifixion. In his portrayal of the women in this vignette, Rufus includes such obvious emotional elements of lamentation as "anguish," "pain," and extreme empathy with the crucified:

> The women stood before the cross and beheld his anguish. And one of them, the tall Miriam, laid her head on the breast of the other Miriam…. But the tall Miriam fell nevertheless on her knees…. Then suddenly she rose,… her face uncovered, and she looked straight into the face of the sufferer on the cross. There were no tears in her eyes…. And it seemed as though his pain and hers moved back and forth between them. We could see the pain of his flesh entering into her….[and] it seemed as though the anguish which she sucked into herself had made her taller…. (Ibid.: 671)

Here, as we know from an earlier passage (see ibid.: 661), "the tall Miriam" is Jesus' mother, Mary, and Miriam of Migdal is Mary Magdalene, the village of Migdal-el (meaning "tower of El"; Josh 19 : 38) being sometimes identified with the latter Mary's home, Magdala (or Magadan; Matt 15 : 39). Later, in the culminating lamentation scene, these two Miriams appear with a third woman, Sulamith (cf. the Shulammite [*Shulammit*] of Song 6 : 13), of whose name Salome (Σαλώμη) – the third woman Mark 15 : 40 identifies by name at the crucifixion – is perhaps a Greek equivalent. This scene, recounted by Jochanon, is Asch's closest approximation of the traditional Christian representation of the lamentation of Jesus. The scene occurs after Joseph Arimathea has obtained the right to bury Yeshua's body, and he is joined by Rabbi Nicodemon, his pupils, and a number of other characters to retrieve the body from the cross.

> On the ground at the foot of the cross lay outstretched the woman Miriam of Migdal, and her face was buried in the earth. And she lay so motionless and stony that we could not tell if she were dead or still living…. Near the cross sat Sulamith, the mother of the Zebedees [cf. Matt 28 : 56]. Her … eyes, red from weeping, were fixed on the body of the Rabbi of Nazareth…. Close by her stood the tall Miriam. The skin of her face had taken on the deathly color of the body of the Rabbi…. Only her eyes, soft and living, sucked in the vision of the tortured body. (Ibid.: 674)

Regarding the juxtaposition of Yeshua's mother and Sulamith here, Asch may or may not have known that the latter's HB namesake, "the Shulammite" of Song 6 : 13, is sometimes associated typologically with Jesus' mother: e.g., most notably Franz Pforr's painting *Sulamith und Maria* (1811, Deutsches Nationalmuseum, Nuremberg) and Johann Friedrich Overbeck's 1828 painting of the same theme (a.k.a. *Italia und Germania*, Staatliche Graphische Sammlung, Munich).

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## III. Visual Arts

An important subject from the medieval period forward, the *Lamentation* (Gk. θρῆνος) of Jesus is depicted in a range of modes. A *pietà* typically offers the Virgin alone, mourning over her son's body, occasionally with one or two other individuals present; a *lamentation* includes John the Evangelist, Mary Magdalene, the other Marys and Martha, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, as well as angels. The setting is sometimes at the foot of the cross, (in which case it can overlap with a *Deposition*), at times near Jesus' tomb, and occasionally without a specific landscape context. The image is most often placed by itself, but is sometimes part of a series focused on key moments in the life of Jesus.

Perhaps the earliest *threnos* scene is found on a small, 11th-century Byzantine ivory (Rossgartenmuseum, Konstanz), on which the body of Jesus is extended on a thick piece of drapery; his mother cradles his upper body, her face cheek-to-cheek with his. John holds his lifeless upraised left hand and perhaps Joseph – the only figure lacking a halo – and behind him, either Nicodemus or Mary Magdalene, all huddle at Christ's feet. Two other figures – Mary and Martha, perhaps – and three hovering angels complete a lyrically crowded scene set near the rounded-arched opening that suggests the mouth of a tomb.

A century later, a second ivory (Victoria and Albert Museum, London) depicts that opening with a door decorated with crosses. This work eliminates all other figures except the Virgin (her head by her son's face), Joseph and Nicodemus (near the feet), and three angels crowding close. The tight scene is placed just below, but in a separate register from a crucifixion (there is a wavy ground line between the events), so that the moment does and does not transpire on Golgotha. From around the same time, a most unusual line drawing (in which only the halos are colored in blue or red) occupies the upper half ("The Three Marys at the Tomb" is below) of the third of four illustrated pages in the 1192–95 Hungarian Pray Codex (National Szechenyi Library, Budapest; the manuscript is named for Gyorgy Pray, who discovered it in 1770). On it, only three figures stand by the outstretched body: John near the feet, Nicodemus by the head and a mournful Joseph near the center of the body, pouring a liquid onto it from a pottery flask – presumably anointing the body to "cleanse" it before it is entombed. Also created in the 12th century is an anonymous wall painting in the Church of St. Panteleimon in Nerezi, Macedonia, in which the Virgin, cheek-to-cheek with her son, offers an emotional intensity reinforced by the only other figure in the image, a bent-over John, his face contorted in pain and pressed against the hand of Jesus.

In the following centuries, the stylistic range and variety and the emotional power of Lamentation renditions expanded dramatically. The extraordinary fresco by Giotto (Scrovegni Chapel, Padua; ca 1305) places John in the compositional center, bending over toward his beloved master, his arms thrown up backwards and helping to lead the viewer's eye from the emotionally packed lower left corner (where the Virgin clutches the head of Jesus, staring intently into his closed eyes as if desperately looking for some sign of life), up along the diagonal landscape ridge to the bare tree on the upper right (a reference to the Tree of Knowledge, perhaps). Mary Magdalene sits slumped at Jesus' feet, staring at them. The other humans – including two anonymous, seated figures without halos, their broad, eloquent backs facing the viewer – earthbound, are counter-balanced by an array of little angels, turned every which way in deep emotional chaos, in the heavens.

A differently conceived, mid-14th-century polyptych by Cecco di Pietro (Museo Nazionale di San Matteo, Pisa) in an archaizing style presents a central *pietà* of the dead Jesus held awkwardly across his mother's substantial lap, flanked by six saints – a kind of *sacra conversazione* – each under an ogive arched form and placed against a gold-leaf background. By contrast, the ca 1350 image by the anonymous Sienese painter pseudonymously referred to as Ugolino Lorenzetti (tentatively identified as Bartolommeo Bulgarini; Fogg Museum, Cambridge, Mass.) presents the Virgin as the central figure – appropriately enough, since the pain of death, particularly in this Christian context, really pertains to those left behind to mourn rather than to those who have departed. Swooning, she is held up by a second Mary and Martha, as she clasps her son's lifeless hand. Mary Magdalene holds the left foot of a Jesus who lies stiffly as if with rigor mortis; John sits nearby and contemplates his master's head; Nicodemus and Joseph stand flanking the scene as four small angels swirl in grief in the gold-leaf heavens.

Similarly, the 1460 image by Petrus Christus (Musée Royaux de Beaux Arts, Brussels) places the Virgin at the center, held up by John and a second Mary, as the body of Jesus is gently laid down on its white shroud by Nicodemus, while Joseph clasps that textile's other end. Mary Magdalene, preoccupied by grief, sits – or collapses – alone to the left, near the foot of the cross (where the *memento mori* image of a skull sits); two other figures stand to the right side of the composition. The nails of Jesus' suffering, a hammer, pliers, and the container of spikenard ointment are strewn along the foreground of a naturalistic landscape; none of the figures is adorned with a halo.


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Sandro Botticelli's tempera panel (1490–92; Alte Pinakothek, Munich), *Lamentation*, the action set before the cave-like opening of a large tomb, depicts all of its protagonists with halos, angled perspectivally. The extended body of the Christ, most of its weight on his mother's lap, offers feet (held by Mary Magdalene) and head (cradled by the third Mary) slumping heavily downward. This image, like a *sacra conversazione*, adds Saints Peter and Jerome to the standard repertoire of figures; perhaps reflecting the influence of Savonarola in Florence, there is an emotional dimension – albeit stylized – rarely encountered in Botticelli's work.

That dimension is reflected through an altogether different visual prism in Mantegna's landmark tempera on canvas image (1480s, Pinacoteca de Brera, Milan) with its feet-to-face extreme perspective. The dead Jesus lies on a marble slab, his wounds glaring at the viewer, and only the front of the face of his weeping mother – presented as old, unlike the standard depiction of her as eternally young, her huge hand wiping at her eyes with a handkerchief – and still less of the face of an aging John are included in a tight little scene. By contrast, Matthias Grunewald's extremely horizontal oil on wood (1525; private collection) is filled with the body of Jesus; only the wringing hands of a mourner – presumably the Virgin – enter the frame, from above, and tiny images of two donors kneel with their coats-of-arms at the ends of the image.

An unusual terracotta grouping, done by Niccolo dell'Arca (1463–90, Santa Maria della Vita, Bologna) presents Jesus laid out before a group of six standing figures, each in a distinctive and different pose. John occupies the center, hand on chin; the Virgin, the second Mary and Martha flank him; Magdalene swoops in, screaming hysterically, at the right, and Joseph stares out at the viewer on the left. By contrast, an anonymous Austrian artist carved a polychrome wooden grouping in ca. 1499, in which all seven mourners – Joseph in the center – and the recumbent Christ are clumped together in one dynamic piece (Schlossmuseum, Linz, *see* →plate 9a).

Among various images by Rubens, his 1617 triptych, sometimes reffered to as *Christ on the Straw* (Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Antwerp), its central panel with a pale-skinned Jesus slumping vertically, around whom John, Joseph and the Virgin crowd, is flanked by the Virgin and Child in the left panel (the Child staring intently into the central image) and John with his eagle and his Gospel text on the right panel.

Diverse renderings continue into the modern era. These include the color-rich nineteenth-century replacement stained-glass windows in the Cologne Cathedral – a four-panel compendium, in which a line of figures gathers around the supine body of Jesus held on his mother's lap, Joseph holding up the head and Mary Magdalene the feet, at the foot of a cross around which angels swirl. Conversely, Arnold Bocklin's 1868 oil painting (Kunstmuseum, Basel) isolates a sensuously robust Mary Magdalene twisting away and alone in her grief from the Christ's body, her diaphanous black veil spilling across his lower body.

Still different are contemporary Byzantine-icon-style works; or the Santero-style image done in 1997 by Marie Romeo Cash as part of her *Stations of the Cross* series, in the redecorated 1886–87 Cathedral of San Francisco in Santa Fe, New Mexico; or Kehinde Wiley's politicized 2008 oil painting, in which a fully dressed black man lies like Mantegna's *Dead Christ*, surrounded by leafy vines, suggesting that he has been done in by the prejudicial police system of the United States.

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## IV. Film

The lamentation of Jesus is one of the important biblical-artistic themes around Jesus' death and resurrection since the Middle Ages – including themes such as the crucifixion, deposition, pietà, anointing, and entombment (see above "I. Christianity, Literature, and Music" and "II. Visual Arts"). This artistic scene is not genuinely consistent with the biblical narrative since no single canonic gospel of the four recounts any particular scene of lamentation. The Gospels only tersely report that at the cross there were few people from his inner circle and other female followers who witnessed the crucifixion from a distance (Matt 27 : 55–56; Luke 23 : 49; Mark 15 : 40–41; John 19 : 25b–27) and later that Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus retrieved the body of Jesus from the cross and buried it (Matt 27 : 57–61; Mark 15 : 42–47; Luke 23 : 44–49; John 19 : 38–42). No specific "lamentation" happens in a strict sense in all these accounts. Thus, it is fair to conclude that the lamentation of Jesus is a pious product of the biblical-artistic imagination from the Middle Ages. Yet insofar as film borrows heavily from iconic moments in the visual arts, it has followed suit in (audio-)visually expanding the biblical account to include such scenes of lamentation. Since such scenes appear in almost every Jesus film, only a few notable examples will be discussed here.

*The Passion of the Christ* (dir. Mel Gibson, 2004, US) most explicitly enacts the lamentation of Jesus as it was understood and painted during the Middle Ages. In the film, the Virgin, Mary Magdalene, and "the disciple whom he loved" (John 19 : 26, understood according to Church tradition as John) stand mournfully by the cross as Jesus dies. Mary kisses the pierced feet of her son, covering her lips with


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the redemptive blood of Jesus, which Gibson emphasizes at every opportunity. When Jesus breathes his last breath, a single raindrop falls from heaven like a massive tear as though the Father is also mourning his son. Later the two Marys, John, and Joseph of Arimathea observe as two Roman soldiers lower the body of Jesus from the cross. Then, the film shoots a relatively long scene of Pietà, in which Mary's pitiful eyes directly look down on the disfigured-bloody face of Jesus with his body embraced into her bosom. Lastly, the lamentation ends with Mary's eyes now looking directly with unfocused eyes at the camera (thus, at the viewers). A key message is clear by this intentional editing. Jesus was truly a human being at least at this particular moment – dead, disfigured, hopeless, defeated, and abandoned – and the audience shares the blame for (and potential benefits of) his sacrificial death.

Another interesting depiction of the lamentation of Jesus appears in *The King of Kings* (dir. Cecil B. DeMille, 1927, US), one of Hollywood's classic films about Jesus. In this silent epic film, no explicit deposition or lamentation of Jesus is demonstrated. Rather, Jesus remains on the cross until the camera turns to the next resurrection scene. Yet, the film, as its own imagination, shows Mary Magdalene clinging to the cross during the final moments of Jesus' breaths along with many other women weeping on the ground. Thus, Magdalene takes the central role of the lamentation in place of the Virgin. Before turning to the resurrection, Jesus on the cross is glorified with bright lights poured onto his breathless body, which is venerably celebrated by the surrounding men and women, including several Roman soldiers.

Finally, the lamentation scene in *Jesus of Nazareth* (dir. Franco Zeffirelli, 1977, IT/UK) reflects the narration of John. Toward the end of this six-hour miniseries, Jesus on the cross looks down to his weeping mother and "the disciple whom he loved," saying, "Woman, here is your son" and "Here is your mother." Thus, Jesus even in the final moments of extreme human suffering appears as a compassionate divine comforter. Then, he dies helpless as a storm begins and is eventually lowered to the wet ground, surrounded by the wailing Virgin, two weeping male disciples, Magdalene reverently kissing his feet, and other mourning women.

While Jesus films that originate in Hollywood, imitate Western artistic traditions like the Pietà, the Indian Jesus film *Karunamayudu* (dir. A. Bhimsingh, 1978, IN) follows different artistic conventions. The disconsolate Magdalene, wearing a vivid green veil and ample blue eye shadow, leans against the foot of the cross, while other female mourners stand nearby. When melodramatic music signals Jesus' death, numerous rapid cuts offer views of various mourners furiously wiping their eyes or wailing into the heavens as nature convulses with a volcanic eruption, a tidal wave, an earthquake, and a solar eclipse. When his body is lowered from the cross, women clean his wounds and wrap his body before he is carried to the tomb.

These cinematic moments are clearly influenced by prevailing artistic traditions. Cumulatively, they emphasize the humanity of Jesus and the poignancy of his death on the cross. Depictions of mourners reacting to the crucifixion and lamenting Jesus' death, serve as stand ins for the ideal audience member who is responding similarly.

**Bibliography:** ▪ Tatum, W. B., "Jesus and the Gospels at the Movies," in *The Bible in Motion*, pt. 2 (ed. R. Burnette-Bletsch; HBR 2; Berlin 2016) 419–48.

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*See also* →Pietà; →Stabat Mater


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