

I Trenta denari di Giuda: Storia di reliquie imprevedute nell'Europa medievale e moderna. Lucia Travaini.

Sacro/santo 27. Rome: Viella, 2020. 350 pp. €30.

Lucia Travaini's book (translated in English in January 2022 as *The Thirty Pieces of Silver: Coin Relics in Medieval and Modern Europe* and published by Routledge) offers a fresh inside into a very intriguing topic for the Christian world: the destiny of the thirty pieces of silver as a symbol of the price of the blood of Jesus Christ, the sum of money for which Judas betrayed him. The story that ensues speaks of the fact that Judas soon came to regret it, gifting the money to the priests and hanging himself. The priests could not keep the silver coins stained with innocent blood and bought a potter's field. However, the story did not end there. Despite being despised for their role in the death verdict of Christ, the coins from the famous bloody monetary transaction become venerated as holy relics of Passion of Christ in churches, monasteries, and convents in medieval and early modern Europe.

Lucia Travaini clearly noticed the complexity of many issues that were directly interconnected with the main topic, offering readers a comprehensive study in which analyses of the hagiographic legends, veneration, and devotion of the relics (true and false) intertwine, as well as the importance of money in Christian economic thought, anti-Judaism, pilgrimages, etc. In order to meet broad and interdisciplinary research requirements, the book is divided into nine chapters.

Following the introduction, the first chapter considers the history of the specific process from the ritual uses of coins to their creation as relics. Travaini elaborates on the moral significance of the coins, as well as the veneration of the antique coins as potent talismans and amulets against danger, illness, and evil. Contributing to such a belief was the antiquity of the coins, the purity of the metal from which they were made, and the iconography of the images imprinted on them.

Following a historical and conceptual thread, in the second chapter the author offers a next step that leads to the main topic: a survey of the role of the coins of Saint Helena, as objects of devotion before the invention of the thirty pieces of silver. Due to the link with the true cross, the depictions of Byzantine emperors on the one side and Christ on the other are interpreted as the images of Constantine and Helena (*konstantinata* and *santelene*), to which were attributed healing and thaumaturgical powers.

The subsequent chapter discusses the gospel story of Judas's betrayal to ask the basic question of why a monetary transaction was needed to create the Christian design of the salvation. The Christian-building persona of Judas as a negative prototype of a Jew is linked with interpretations of the thirty pieces of silver as usury money when they fell into his hands. According to medieval legend, these coins had existed since the time of Abraham's father and had been used in many transactions recorded in the Bible. Referring to the numerous works of Giacomo Todeschini, an interpretation of the distinctive medieval correlation between economics and theology is offered.

The three chapters that follow analyze in detail the hagiographic legend of the thirty pieces of silver, subsequently their insertion into the iconography of the Passion, and finally, their veneration as relics. Also noteworthy is Travaini's careful iconographic analysis of the phenomenon of the coins in images of the *arma Christi*, *imago pietatis*, the Mass of Saint Gregory, and certain heraldic depictions. The convincing analysis is also based on appropriate written sources, such as corroborated and carefully selected illustrations. No less commendable is the exploration of the specific coins as the relics, from the first written documents in which they are mentioned, to the records of pilgrims who met them in the following centuries in sacral places. Such a detailed analysis is supported at the end of the book with two appendixes: one with a list and data regarding the forty-seven sites with the relics of the thirty pieces of silver, and the other with a list of written sources on the topic, edited by Francesco di Angelo.

To conclude, this is an important and intriguing book that will appeal to scholars of various topics: theology, the function of relics, iconography, numismatics, and economics. Also, Travaini's study of the thirty pieces of silver opens issues which are sure to interest researchers who are directly involved with the influence of money on the economy of salvation. These are primarily topics linked with testamentary *pro anima* legacies, as well as other types of endowments.

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Inspiration and Authority in the Middle Ages: Prophets and Their Critics from Scholasticism to Humanism. Brian FitzGerald.

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As Brian FitzGerald observes, "Prophecy's place as a defining feature of the religious culture of the Latin Middle Ages has been clear for some time" (1). In this book he explores what prophecy might have meant in addition to its usual sense of eschatological prediction.

The six chapters of the book are arranged chronologically. The first, "Hugh of St. Victor and the Prophetic Contemplation of History," discusses the ways in which prophetic insight could be construed in terms of the study of history and its purposes, and further cultivated by the examination of the natural world and its workings. The next chapter, "The Scholastic Exegesis of Prophecy," examines twelfth-century commentaries on the Psalms, and how Gilbert of Poitiers and Peter Lombard saw in the psalter the prophetic hand of Ezra the scribe, who had rearranged the Psalms in achronological sequence in order to demonstrate Christian theological truths. Here prophecy was extended to the exposition of God's verities in Scripture, an exegetical move that had biblical authority in the prophetic status of King David, the traditional author of the Psalms.