The roles of soldiers in the New Testament, especially in the sequence of the Passion narrative, are of considerable interest. They represent an important aspect of the judicial-administrative framework within which the Crucifixion, and the events leading up to it, took place. Apart from the Magi, soldiers were the first gentiles to experience conversion. And they played a part in the spreading of the Gospel.

Their depiction, therefore, was not casual. And because in theological terms they were less central to the unique temporal significance of the Gospel story than were its civilian protagonists, and because of the perennial fascination exercised by the practitioners of war, artists were freer to show them in terms of their observation of contemporary soldiers or at least in terms of their feelings about them.

It is, then, worth following their depiction through a century — roughly 1430 to 1530 — of changes in style, devotion, historical perspective and media (prints), and two areas, Switzerland-Germany-Austria and Italy, where progressive immersion within warfare coincided with a partial but growing rapprochement between forms of artistic expression, northern and southern, which had previously been sharply distinctive.

The hill of Calvary, in Mantegna’s painting of 1457-9 in the Louvre, has been under military occupation (Fig. 1). The wound in Christ’s side, the breaking of the malefactors’ legs are alluded to with the utmost reticence. Two soldiers, one behind the group of Marys, the other in the right foreground, look up at the work they have supervised. Others continue to gamble for Christ’s seamless robe, watched quietly by two of their officers, one of whom holds it by one end, while a Jew holds the other, a summation of the

*The Neale Memorial Lecture delivered in Manchester on 6 November 1985. I am grateful to the electors to the Lectureship for the chance to impose some order on work which remains, however, at a preliminary stage.
Fig. 1
Mantegna. Crucifixion, Louvre.
connivance that has brought God to Golgotha. But the soldiery's chief task is done. One descends the steps leading down from the platform on which Mantegna has presented the scene. The rest file off at the rear to begin the long climb back to Jerusalem.

In 1511 Wolf Huber — or an artist very close to him¹ — drew an earlier stage in the drama (Fig. 2). The cross on the left has been installed. The final wedges are being driven into the socket of Christ's, and one of the soldiers stands back to signal that it is steady in the vertical. Another arduously waits for the fixing in position of the third. In this scene the military are not simply supervising a punishment carried out in an area subject to civilian jurisdiction, but have planted the crosses of the Passion in their own provost marshal's execution ground. It is on his gibbet that the hanged man behind the Marys rots; his is the raised wheel on which men are exposed when their bones have been broken after an infringement of military discipline; one of his men guards the ground, hand on sword, while another, behind Christ's cross, prepares to plunge his dagger into another malefactor.

This is not the moment to point the contrast between the two works, between Mantegna's Roman soldiers, painted by a man of antiquarian interests south of the Alps and in a time of peace, and Huber's thoroughly contemporary Landsknechts, drawn north of the Alps in a time of war; rather, to suggest the vision, shared by two utterly different imaginations, of the central Christian mystery as being stage-managed by soldiers. It is a vision made all the clearer by the decision not to focus attention on the two soldiers who stepped out of the ranks, and became indissolubly part of that mystery, Longinus and the Good Centurion.

We move closer to them with an engraver who closely followed Mantegna's manner and mood (but mongrelized his Roman armour²). We are at a later stage in the Calvary narrative. It is usually treated as a sombrely domestic event: the lowering of Christ's body from the cross by his friends, while his real and extended family express their grief. On the extreme right are the last of the files of troops who set off back to Jerusalem. Yet, intrudingly, two soldiers remain, and in the foreground. One holds

¹ It is signed 'J S'. On its authorship, see Franz Winzinger, *Wolf Huber, das Gesamtwerk*, 2 vols. (Munich, 1979), i. 137-8.

Fig. 2

Master J. S. Crucifixion, Berlin, Staatliches Kupferstichkabinett.
a spear, or lance, the other inclines his head with an expression of brooding acceptance.

This allusiveness relied on common knowledge of who the irreducible cast of characters on Calvary were. From time to time, artists had detached them from the crowded narrative of that scene and brought them forward alone in, as it were, a curtain call for divine principals. In Italy, such a work was Crivelli's predella panel in the parish church of Massa Fermana (Ascoli Piceno) of 14683. From the spectator's left they are: Longinus, clasping his hands in prayerful gratitude, his lance resting on the ground and balanced against his shoulder, the Virgin, Christ on his cross (the only one shown in such scenes), John, the Good Centurion. In the north woodcuts acted as didactic intermediaries between worshipper and 'high' art, and one, roughly contemporary with Crivelli's panel, re-states long-familiar knowledge4.

The soldier on the right (Fig. 3), who points to Christ while turning to the two Jews with the words of his label, "vere filius dei est", is the Good Centurion who, according to Matthew and Mark, was moved by Christ's cry as he gave up the ghost and by the earthquake that occurred then, to say "Truly, this was the son of God". On the left, behind the thief who recognized the divinity of Christ and whose soul, therefore, is being picked up by an angel, is the soldier who, in St. John's words, "with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water". Well before the Renaissance, devotional literature and pious legend had given him a name, Longinus, a miracle — his impaired sight was restored when drops of blood from the wound he made fell on his eyes — and a biography: he became a convert, a monk, a missionary and finally a martyr and saint.

The soldiers of Calvary were, then, not simply the instruments of Pilate's political authority. That was their role when supervising the erection of the crosses and breaking the legs of the malefactors; "The Jews, ... that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day, ... besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. Then came the soldiers, and broke the legs of the first, and of the other that was

crucified with him". They also, through the two soldier-converts, symbolized the propagation of the faith among the gentiles which led from Christ to Christianity and to the art we are considering. And, in addition, they stood for the spiritual perceptiveness of the west as opposed to the obscurantism of the near east. Longinus' blind eyes were opened. The Pharisees argue back at the Good Centurion even while the devil takes the soul of the stubborn malefactor above their heads. This latter theme, that of the Good Centurion as the First Missionary, faded in Italy from the trecento but remained animated in the North. Between the two, the Jew Stephaton, permanently transformed by medieval prejudice from the soldier (therefore Roman) of the Gospel, futilely dabs the negating vinegar on his sponge towards the saviour's lips. Limiting ourselves to the narrow occupied zone of Calvary, we can see, then, how many considerations interrupted the artist's transcription of his own feelings about soldiers, whether this involved his fearing them as legitimized outlaws preying on civilians or accepting them as guardians protecting the peace in which he could tranquilly practice his craft.

Given the biblical and legendary contexts and his potential linking to the soldiery of an artist's own day, how was Longinus to be portrayed? In the widely-copied late thirteenth-century Meditations on the Life of Christ, Mary humbly kneels and begs the soldiers not to break her son's body. "One of them, Longinus by name ... impious and proud ... extending his lance from a distance, scorning ... prayers and entreaties, opened a great wound in the right side of the Lord Jesus". But this confrontation between cruel soldier and beseeching woman, so easily realizable by the imagination (as was the intention of the Meditations), was almost never shown on Calvary5, though it was a dominant motive in depictions of the Massacre of the Innocents. What was more important was to show the miracle associated with the first human contact, after the Flagellation6, with Christ's blood.

In German and Bohemian painting, almost habitually up to the mid-fifteenth century and in regional centres up to the early

5 Though see the fourteenth-century Siennese illumination and its c.1430 French echo in Emile Mâle, L'art religieux de la fin du Moyen Âge en France (Paris, 1925), pp. 31-2.
6 For some artists (Piero della Francesca?) it does not seem unlikely that this aspect of the subject affected iconology and mood.
Fig. 3
Anon. *Crucifixion*, Hofbibliothek, Vienna.
sixteenth, this was commonly achieved by his pointing to his eyes; on occasion, one was shown closed, the other open, as though to prise apart the split second of the miracle. Almost always he was shown with his soldier-servant whose function it was to guide the lance home into Christ’s side, or, thereafter, to gaze in wonder at his newly-sighted master. Sometimes — a motif continued at least until Hans Raphon’s 1508 Crucifixion — the significance of the wound is stressed by an angel catching part of the blood in an eucharistic chalice as the lance pierces Christ’s side. In 1522 Hans Leu the Younger, in his Crucifixion in the Basel Kunstmuseum, depicted Longinus pointing to the consequential scenes in the background: the Entombment, the Resurrection, Christ’s appearance in the garden.

In Quattrocento Italy the prominence earlier accorded to the significance of Longinus became muted. Salimbeni’s fresco in the Oratory of the Baptist in Urbino sums up a waning didactic tradition with its symmetrical emphasis on the lance of Longinus and the letters spelling out the Good Centurion’s acknowledgement of Christ’s divinity, and its association of chalice with lance. Unusual, too, was the revival in Boccati’s Crucifixion predella in Perugia of Trecento emotional realism: the mounted Longinus charges past the kneeling Marys as though ramming his lance at a quintain.

Much later, in 1531, Lotto gave the traditional Longinus-servant group the status of an almost audible shout of exalted recognition. Normally, however, representations were sobered by the typological tradition codified in the illustrated versions of the Biblia pauperum, which circulated in block-book and printed form in growing numbers from the mid-fifteenth century, and in which the blood he drew from Christ’s side is likened to the emergence of Eve from Adam’s, and to the flow of proto-eucharistic water from the rock that Moses struck. The sobering of narrative that also followed the Quattrocento feeling for

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8 E.g. the gesture indicating his eyes in Manchester’s recently acquired Crucifixion by Duccio or a close follower.
9 In Lorenzo Monaco’s Crucifixion panel in the Louvre, Longinus holds out his palm to receive the blood dripping from the wound in Christ’s right hand.
10 Altarpiece in S. Maria in Telusano, Monte San Giusto (B. Berenson, Lotto (Milan, 1955), figs. 248-250).
decorum is well exemplified in a drawing by Jacopo Bellini; the Marys mourn, the Good Centurion on the right vouches for Christ's divinity, Longinus, converted, worships. And by a perhaps involuntary association of ideas, the entirely un-Calvary figure charging in from the left, and seemingly about to topple back out of the saddle, suggests the conversion of another ex-brute and persecutor, Paul, to whom we shall turn later on.

That attempts to show Longinus as a person, as well as a symbol in a theological equation, persist in Italy, though not as frequently or emphatically as in the north, is perhaps due in part to the arrival of the head of his lance in Rome in 1492 as a bribe to Pope Innocent VIII from Sultan Bajazet to keep his refugee brother and rival, Djem, in safe custody, and to legends that had long established him as a patron saint of Mantua. Thanks to this latter connection Mantegna, who had in about 1472 aided his circulation in the iconological bloodstream through a most moving and dignified engraving, showed him among other military saints — his unbroken lance contrasted to St. George's shattered one — in an altarpiece commemorating the Marquis of Mantua Francesco Gonzaga's participation in the battle against the French at Fornovo in 1495. And in his Louvre altarpiece, Giulio Romano, working in Mantua, showed the Virgin adoring the Child with, on her right, Longinus, in splendid Roman parade armour, holding a lance in one hand and the reliquary of the Holy Blood in the other, and with St. John the Evangelist on her left holding his chalice attribute.

In the north, where, in Nuremberg, there was a rival lance-head which from 1423 had been displayed each Easter to crowds of pilgrims from a covered platform in the Hauptmarkt, an increasingly flexible narrative facility had led in four directions. One simply varied the ways in which attention could be drawn to Longinus' pre-miracle blindness, as on the left of Thomas de Coloswar's symmetrically crowded Calvary scene of 1427 in the Christian Museum at Esztergom. A second — Grünewald's Crucifixion of 1501-8 in Basel is a good example — conflated


12 The broken lance is not a consistent indicator of St. George, e.g. in the National Gallery's altarpiece ascribed to Giovanni Martini da Udine or Cima's triptych of 1511 in Caen, Musée des Beaux-Arts, where the Saint, with intact lance, is identified by a dragon and the princess respectively.
Longinus with the Good Centurion in a generalized pagan witness figure combining Longinus’ lance with the centurion’s “vere filius dei erat ille”, or, as in a devotional engraving of c.1500, the Good Centurion draws the worshippers’ attention to Christ while a cowled figure behind him prominently displays Longinus’ lance. The third dissolves Longinus among the characters of Calvary in a way that encourages a leisured reading of the scene without compositional or theological signposts. In this, more common in the graphic arts than in painting, he was not usually so easy to spot as is the forlorn and apparently unmotivated figure, a puzzled Don Quixote, in the left background of Dürer's 1504 or 1505 Crucifixion woodcut. A fourth, less usual, solution was reached in the mid-fifteenth century by the Master of the Benedickbeurer Crucifixion (Munich, Alte Pinakothek). Here the blind Longinus is helped to ram home his enormous lance point, and is then shown again beneath the cross, celebrating the miracle of his restored sight in the embrace of the Good Centurion. Beside them, underneath the ladder on the right, a crossbowman on a white horse aims his weapon directly out at the viewer, as if to jolt him into paying attention to the significance of this invention. Interestingly, the woodcut on the title-page of Luther’s first published work, the German Theology (Wittenberg, 1516) showed Longinus and the Centurion conversing beside the cross.

So whereas in religious drama Longinus could be represented as a villainous warrior — in a Perugian sacra rappresentazione he was even made to declare that he came to Calvary determined to get his lance into Mary as well — as well as a regenerate one, in art the significance of his action tended to denature his visual impact as a soldier. Commonly shown as old and bearded, he was a ritual figure; however garbed, as Roman, ‘oriental’, or plated man-at-arms, he was never colloquialised into a reminder of the potentially villainous soldiers of the artist’s own day.

The same is true of depictions of the Good Centurion. Though artists clearly relished the compositional advantage of two diagonals pointing towards Christ — Longinus’ lance, the Centurion’s gesturing arm — and in low perspective schemes frequently made

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13 Vienna, Albertina, Kupferstichkabinett, S.D. 39. 1928, 72. Monogram S IX H.
them stand out against the sky\textsuperscript{15}, nonetheless, when one of them was omitted it was almost always Longinus. As between Longinus, the first discoverer of the efficacy of Christ’s blood, and the Centurion, the first pleader for Christ’s divinity (in compositions with many figures he is usually shown arguing the case with doubters and mockers\textsuperscript{16}), the missionary soldier appears to have had the edge from the later fifteenth century.

Why this should be so can only be conjectured. The legendary nature of the Longinus miracle as against the Testament \textit{ipse dixit} of the Centurion’s conversion; the shock of 1453, followed as it was by the Turkish occupation of Otranto in 1480 and growing pressure on Venetian and Imperial territory later in the decade; the wish to avoid controversy about the nature of the sacraments; for whatever reason, the Centurion’s role came to predominate, and because, by artistic convention, he was a man of eloquence, he was often shown — though usually wearing a sword — in civilian garb. As with Longinus, his potentially scary militarism was denatured.

Indeed, the New Testament as a whole did not invoke the image of the soldier as a warrior. When the soldiers came to John the Baptist and asked “And what shall we do?” he answered in terms that envisaged them as behaving only in a police role: “Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages”. If the soldiers figured largely in the story of the Passion and in the Acts of the Apostles it was because political authorities used them — as they did in the Renaissance — to discipline potentially dangerous minorities.

We should also bear in mind that when the Testament narrative singles out an individual soldier it is because he had a ‘good’ part

\textsuperscript{15} As, for example, Signorelli’s \textit{Crucifixion} in the Ducal Palace, Urbino. Mario Salmi, \textit{Luca Signorelli} (Munich, 1955), fig. 21a.

\textsuperscript{16} The motif of a human face in relief taking up the atropeaic use of Gorgon or Medusa heads in ancient art, appears on the centurion’s shield in the Crucifixion group (late thirteenth century) of the South Portal of Rouen Cathedral. Ignored in Italy, it was chiefly employed in Bohemian painting c.1380-c.1420. (e.g. four examples in the Castle Museum, Prague) and appears to have petered out shortly thereafter in Saxony (Missal illuminated by John of Zittau, fig. 129 in Bernhard Blumenkrantz, \textit{Le jeu médiéval au miroir de l’art chrétien} (Paris, 1966)) with occasional later re-surfacings, as in the 1494 tabernacle in the Cloisters, New York, by Master Perchtloid (where the face-shield is held by the centurion’s ‘squire’). The iconographic ‘value’ of the motif was that by emphasizing the pagan identity of the centurion it strengthened the impact of his conversion.
to play in God's providential plan. Thus Cornelius, the centurion of Capernaum, is named because his faith in Jesus' power to cure his servant in absentia prompted Christ's reproachful comment to his followers: "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And I say unto you, that many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom [that is, the Jews] shall be cast out into outer darkness". And the other Cornelius, the centurion of Caesarea, is named because his Gentile household's baptism by Peter gave momentum to the earlier spontaneous conversions of Longinus and the Good Centurion.

Neither of the Corneliuses offered much purchase for the imagination of artists. Nor did Acts minister to Renaissance distrust of the period's soldiery. Its narrative preserved a neutral attitude to the troops whose sleep permitted Peter's escape from prison (for which they were put to death, as were those who had failed to prevent Christ's rising from his tomb), and to the centurion — another soldier-Gentile! — whose kindness to Paul enabled him to carry the gospel to Rome.

Paul himself was born and bred a Jew, though a Roman citizen, and it was his zeal for the old law that made him a persecutor of the followers of Jesus. Nowhere is any reference made to his being an actual soldier. The Golden Legend has him say to Nero "I am a soldier of the Eternal King", but that this was not to be taken literally is clear from the narrative as a whole. Yet with one accord artists showed him as having been one when divine revelation felled him on his way to Damascus; whether armoured as a Roman, as in Baccio Baldini's engraving of c.1465, or as a late Gothic knight as in Martin Enzelsberger's altarpiece of the later 1490s. It was as a soldier that he could repeat the conversion experience of Longinus, and his first words on recovering from it, "What shall I do, Lord?", echoed the question the soldiers had put to John: "And what shall we do?". From the first Cornelius', acceptance of the Gospel had been associated with converted Roman military officers, and it must have seemed appropriate to climax the military line in the story that led to, and then radiated away from, Calvary, with one who could be shown at the head of

17 Hind, op. cit., pl. 95.
his troops. Again, there is no scriptural licence for showing "the men which journeyed with him" as a troop of horse, but when Cranach the Elder showed Paul as a calvary commander on the title page of a commentary on the Epistles in 1526, Pordenone did not hesitate to borrow his pose, and suggest his following, for his startling organ door in the cathedral of Spilimberg.

Because of their roles in fostering or bearing witness to the divine plan, we have been dealing with soldiers who had to be shown as 'good'. And their line would be prolonged if we were to add the military saints. George, Maurice, Victor, Florian; all were Roman soldiers; Sebastian had even been captain of the Pretorian Guard. They and many others whose cults were more local, William of Aquitaine, Quirenus, Hypolitus, Felix, Theodore, Valerian, Venentius and the rest, looked down from glass and from altarpieces. And, with manners smoothed to the court life of heaven, they were necessarily gentlemen all.

It is when we turn from the named, 'good' soldier tradition within Renaissance Christian art to the anonymous ones who massacred the Innocents, herded Jesus through the sufferings and humiliations of the Passion, and assisted in the slaughter of his saints, that we come to scenes in which the artist was freer to express his own attitude to the military, or one he knew would be shared by his patron or audience. We are far from the gentle St. Florian or the meekly enduring Sebastian when we see Anton Woensam's soldiers, after the slaughter of the Christian Theban Legion, sitting on the bodies of their victims, drink in hand.

In comparing north with south, there are material factors to be borne in mind; the greater number of scenes that were produced in the north because of the popularity of Passion-series woodcuts and, to a lesser extent, the influence of the custom of hanging a canvas Fastentuch decorated with Passion scenes in front of the high altar during Lent; the popularity in the north from c.1500 of representations (chiefly in prints and drawings) of contemporary soldiers and incidents in their lives; possibly the greater reliance of northern artists on hints from street scenes and


21 E.g. the example in the Ferdinandaeum, Innsbruck, of c.1490.

the costumes, gestures and grimaces of street theatre than on posed assistants in the workshop who provided a more neutral basis for representation. And there are less material factors: historicist (should early Christian scenes be rendered in real or subjective temporal terms?); aesthetic and devotional (should decorum and meditation or emotion and identification take precedence?); perhaps temperamental (‘national’ characteristics affecting the treatment in art of emotion and real appearances).

But while alert to these issues, let us review the ‘bad soldier’ episodes in the New Testament and in Christianity’s struggle to establish itself.

The brutality of soldiers towards civilians was a common theme in chronicles north and south of the Alps. The massacre of the Innocents was, then, a scene inviting a transcription from life. Depiction of the Massacre in terms of contemporary soldiers killing and looting in an undefended village appeared in Burgundian miniature painting c.1450, and culminated in Breughel’s Massacre of the Innocents in Vienna 23. But, throughout, this remained a Netherlandish motif. German artists concentrated on the expression of personal anguish and savagery, as summed up in the distraught mother tugging the hair and wrenching at the sides of the mouth of the soldier stabbing her baby in the panel in Nuremberg by the Master of the Augsburg Visitation. Yet just after the turn of the century, with a painting by Jorg Breu the Elder, also in Nuremberg, appeared another Netherlandish invention: the coupling of the Flight into Egypt with the Massacre. In this treatment the calm figures of the travellers in the foreground are contrasted to the slaughter they have escaped; but they are at the same time threatened by other soldiers in the mid-ground who interrogate the reapers of the Apocryphal miraculous harvest as to the whereabouts of the holy family. Echoed briefly in Italy, the theme remained domesticated less in Germany itself than in the deep landscapes of Netherlanders; Patenier, Adrien Isenbrandt and the Master of the Female Half Figures. In Italy, though prompting an unwonted excitability in works by Fra Angelico (in S. Marco) and Matteo di Giovanni (Naples, Galleria Nazionale), the tendency was to play down the jumbled horror of the massacre and to achieve a lucid overall composition based — as evidenced

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23 E.g. L.M.J. Delaissé, A century of Dutch manuscript illumination (University of California Press, 1968), fig. 138.
by Raphael's superb drawing for an uncompleted *Massacre* — on a variety of studio poses\(^{24}\) (Fig. 4).

Later New Testament scenes involve soldiers operating within a judicial framework, and their treatment, as we have seen, becomes more equivocal.

In Italian and German cities soldiers, unless called out in times of riot, normally had nothing to do with the processes of arrest and punishment. Arrest was the function of the civilian law officer and his *birri*, a force which might contain ex-soldiers but was, like the executioner and torturer and their assistants, on the municipal payroll. And when their numbers were inadequate to arrest or escort a criminal, recourse was had to civic guards rather than to soldiers in the sense of those paid to fight an enemy rather than carry out police functions.

The Gospel narratives make it clear that the first three stages in the Passion, the arrest of Christ and his being taken before the high priests Annas and Caiaphas, were in the hands of the Jewish administration's police force: "Are ye come out as against a thief with swords and staves for to take me?" asked Jesus. Giotto, in the Scrovegni Chapel, had been careful to observe this distinction. In the later Renaissance, however, in the south as well as the north (as in paintings by Altobello Mellone of 1517 and by Albrecht Altdorfer of about 1516)\(^{25}\), the arrest is shown being carried out by soldiers. And it is in full battle armour that a soldier prepares to strike Christ as he stands before Caiaphas in a panel of c.1505 by Jörg Breu\(^{26}\).

Once Jesus had been passed into Pilate's jurisdiction, however, punishment, from the Flagellation to the Crucifixion, was carried out by the military. *The Golden Legend* quotes St. Jerome: "Jesus is delivered up to the soldiers to be scourged, and the scourges lacerate that most sacred body and that breast wherein God dwelt". And in St. John: "The soldiers platted a crown of thorns, and put it on his head ... And they smote him with their hands".

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\(^{24}\) A. E. Popham and Johann Wilde, *The Italian drawings of the XV and XVI centuries in the collection of His Majesty the King at Windsor Castle* (London, 1949), fig. 55.


\(^{26}\) E. Buchner and K. Feuchtmayr, *Oberdeutsche Kunst der Spägotik und Reformationszeit* (Augsburg, 1924), fig. 230.
How these scenes were rendered, and those of earlier stages in
the Passion sequence, depended, of course, on factors far more
complex than drawing a conscious parallel between contemporary
and ancient judicial procedures. Breu, in his Caiaphas scene, and
in his *Crowning with Thorns* of 1501, was tapping a northern
emotive response to the cruelties to which Jesus was exposed in an
attempt to make the spectator feel personally responsible for
behaviour whereby Christ each day was tortured afresh; for every
sinner had it in him to be a 'bad' soldier or a torturer. In Italy
artistic decorum muted the violence. Moreover, in Italy Passion
prints, like Israhel von Meckenem's 'cruel' *Crowning* did not, as
has been suggested, play anything like the mediating role between
devotional literature, which was equally fervent on both sides of
the Alps, and painting. Nor, in the Germanic world, was there that
humanistically induced respect for the institutions of the ancient
world that could, in a Florentine engraving of about 1460, make
Christ's flogging seem so unimportant an episode within Pilate's
orderly judgement-hall. Indeed, for Italian artists with a his-
torical sense, it was difficult to think of Roman soldiers, who had
come to be celebrated as ideal citizen-warriors and a reproach to
the mercenary and self-seeking soldiery of the present, as being
shown in a 'bad' role. Mantegna, therefore, in his *Flagellation*
engraving, restricts them to a supervisory one, carefully aloof
from the violence they were under orders to see carried out. And
this separation of roles was, though far less methodically, obser-
vied in northern works like Urban Görtschacher's 1508 *Ecce Homo*,
where the soldiers of Pilate's palace guard are carefully
distinguished from the torturer descending the stairs.

To bring soldiers into a religious theme was, nonetheless,
potentially to trouble it with an infusion of experience, or, at least,
prejudice, that did not affect in the same way subjects such as the
Adoration or even the Last Judgement. Soldiers, seen, suffered
from or merely talked about, provided a reality test quite different
from that of studying a girl suckling her child to model a
Madonna on or a dissectable body salvaged from the gallows to
help with the venous system of a decapitated saint. How one reads

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27 Hind, op. cit., pl. 94.
28 E. Tietze-Conrat, *Andrea Mantegna. Le pitture, i disegni, le incisioni* (Florence, 1955), fig. 45.
29 Munich, Unter Belvedere.
the artist-reality relationship is another matter. It is tempting to think that the difference between Urs Graf’s somewhat routine treatment of the Flagellation in the background of his early woodcut (which dates from 1503-6) with its soldier-torturer distinction, and the savage dervish whirl of soldier-tormenters around the pitifully slumped figure of Christ in a drawing of 1520, reflects his own experience as a soldier in the meantime30 (Fig. 5);

Fig. 5
Urs Graf. Christ scourged, Basel, Kupferstichkabinett.

or that the Swiss infantrymen who are so prominent in Niklaus Manuel's *Mocking of Christ* drawing of about 1518 reflect his service with such blasphemous fellow-soldiers. But one cannot be sure. Grünewald's *Christ carrying the Cross* of 1523-5 (Staatliche Kunsthalle, Karlsruhe) shows him similarly environed with figures from the coarsest ranks of the soldiery; and Grünewald did not serve in any war.

A bias within Italian works had been to encourage a contemplative "think on these things" reaction, in contrast to the northern bias towards calling for active empathy in the spirit of the exhortatory "be present at this event" tone of the *Meditations*, or the milder "Look up or down, without you or within, and everywhere you will find the Cross" of *The Imitation of Christ*. A number of Italian artists, under the influence of the notion of historical distance which was part of humanism's exploration of the ancient world, set their Passion scenes in the classical past, whereas most northern artists kept to a convention which, however 'timeless' or exotic, was a constant reminder of the present. These different approaches to chronology had supported the contemplation-empathy divergence. And, to move on from the Gospels to the early centuries of Christianity, they affected the depiction of scenes of martyrdom.

Here, again, there was a stronger tendency to preserve the difference between soldier and torturer or executioner in Italy, though this was seldom so fastidious as in (again) Mantegna's *Martyrdom of St. James* where, as in his *Flagellation*, soldiers merely hold the ring while the executioner prepares to bring his mallet down on the *mannaia*, or short guillotine, or, as in Verocchio's 1478-80 relief *Beheading of the Baptist*, where the soldiers detachedly comment on the significance of the action they supervise. And there was a stronger instinct to protect events in the past from contamination by references to the present.

This historicism was not made consistent either by the antiquarian zeal of a Mantegna or by the more playful *all'antica* fantasies of generations of *cassone* painters. Uccello was content to write S.P.Q.R. on the shield of a contemporary soldier in a

32 Fresco (destroyed) in the Eremitani, Padua.
33 Silver atlar, Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Florence.
martyrdom scene. As contemporaries working in Ferrara, Cosimo Tura made Roman soldiers haul St. Maurelius off to execution while Ercole de' Roberti had Jesus arrested with a noose slipped over his head by a member of the Ferrarese court guard

Contracts with artists did not specify the period within which scenes were to be located. This was up to them, within the overall historicist bias of the culture they were working within. And for details of armour, and other aspects of military costume, they looked to the works of their predecessors and kept alive conventions — like the mocking of 'paynims' by equipping them with risibly fantasticated or mis-matched components, or maintaining, because of their pictorial effectiveness, features that had long been superseded, like the 'pig-faced' basinet of 1360-1410 which haunted the imagination as late as the generation of Dürer and Grünewald. They also looked around: at actual soldiers but also at Roman sculpture, or drawings made from it; at soldiers in manuscript illumination; at foreign merchants and ambassadors' trains, and at gypsies and wandering troupes of entertainers from the near east (for along with Romans the artist had to show Jews and 'pagans'); at street or church theatre which caught hints from such visits and preserved them in their wardrobes; at processions like the one Dürer watched in Antwerp in 1520 which included "St. George with his squires, a very goodly knight in armour" and "boys and maidens most finely and splendidly dressed in the costumes of many lands, representing various saints"

As with productions of Shakespeare today, the story came first, and it was up to the artist, as to the director, to choose its setting. The sense of period was also affected by the use of religious scenes as allegories of present concerns. In the Vatican, Raphael Romanised the main action in the Expulsion of Heliodorus from the Temple (an allegory of Julius II's reform of papal administration) because the contemporary point was made by having the Pope observe it. Without such a painted observer, he showed St. Peter's liberation from prison — that is, the papacy's liberation

35 J.G. Mann, "Instances of antiquarian feeling in medieval and Renaissance art", Archeological Journal, lxxxix (1932), 265.
from pressure from foreign armies — in terms of contemporary military costumes. Humanist historicism, moreover, coexisted in most artists’ minds with a blithe disregard of anachronism. In the foreground of Carpaccio’s Martyrdom of the 10,000 of 1515 (Venice, Accademia), a Romanized soldier on the left coexists with a contemporary one on the right; a similar juxtaposition occurs in the right foreground of Sodoma’s Deposition (Siena, Accademia), where two soldiers — possibly Longinus and the Good Centurion — happily chat across a costume divide of a millennium and a half.

In the north the historicist element was less fluid. Basically it consisted of a dressing-up-box approach, represented by the altarpiece of 1492 by Jan Pollak in the Munich National Museum: a mixture of no-longer-fashionable civilian finery, contemporary parade armour, turbans and headbands suggestive of the east, helmets fantasticized away from a direct reference to period quotation. Ten years later, in Jan Joest of Kalkar’s wonderful torch-lit procession leading towards the arrest of Christ of c.1500, the approach is similar37. Though holding contemporary weapons, pike and halberd, the soldiers — like the swordsman grasping Christ, who wears German party-coloured hose, an eastern European quilted jacket and a Levantine turban — the emphasis is not so much on a particular place or time but on the contrast between sacred (the robes of Christ and Peter) and profane. So it was in 1504 when Hans Burgkmair placed between an undatably oriental Longinus and a Jewish officer of the high priests’ watch, a Good Centurion wearing an eastern turban, a breastplate of a type that was by then fifty years out of date, and frilly mail garters of a sort that had never been worn38.

This eclecticism, with its hints of of actual Levantines, Jews or Turks, and of quasi-oriental Hungarians and Slavs, of armour in stained glass windows, on tombs or preserved in castles, of patrician fashions of an earlier year like the Magdalen’s gown, must have (‘could have’, it is perhaps safer to say) drawn the spectator’s imagination towards the present, away from the less attention-demanding detail of the stereotyped costume of the

more routinely holy characters, Christ in his loincloth, the Marys in their robes. And soldiers, because of their continuing function across the ages, and their alarming and changing weaponry, were best calculated of all characters to bring the imagination forward. Joerg Ratgeb was, with Grünewald, the outstanding visionary of German Renaissance art. The soldiers in his Resurrection, toppled back by the blast of Christ's rising from his tomb, are dressed as no contemporary soldier could be. But the one in the left foreground props himself on his gun, and between him and his recumbent colleagues are the up-to-the-moment jug and playing cards with which they had been beguiling their watch.

This is a work of 1517 or 1518. The sacred charade tradition, if we can call it that, continued for at least another generation, especially in northern and north-eastern Germany. In the south, from Switzerland across to Austria, it was modified. This was the area most open, through travel and the traffic in prints and drawings, to Italian humanistic art, and in which, from the late fifteenth century, the secular, genre, interest in soldiers developed to the point of making foot soldiers (who formed the characteristic military presence in religious art) the most lavishly recorded of all contemporary occupation groups.

The antiquarian, period-setting Roman soldiers of the south, and their classicized colleagues, were rejected. Throughout the work of Dürer, for instance, the greatest artistic mind and hand, if not the greatest artistic spirit of German art, and the keenest follower of what Italy had to offer the north, there was no Romanization of the figures in the extensive corpus of his religious works. He kept to the exotic-timeless mix; though, thanks to his fascination with the appearance and manners of the Landsknechts of his own day, he could mark the Good Centurion, as he talks to an oriental Longinus, with an indication of their characteristic insignia, the St. Andrew's cross, and in his Arrest of Christ show a Landsknecht preparing to rape a woman in the background. In Daniel Hopfer's supremely 'northern' etching of c.1520(?), a jeering soldier reaches his long-pole partisan clear across the

39 In the Herrenberg Altar, Alte Staatsgalerie, Stuttgart.
composition to steer Longinus' lance into its target. On the whole, however, the genre figure of the Landsknecht was played down in Passion scenes. It was chiefly in martyrdoms that he struck the note of the utterly up-to-date brutal soldiery. Wolf Huber's *Execution of the Baptist* drawing of c.1510 almost uncannily naturalised the event within the citizens and soldiery of a contemporary German town. In 1508 Hans Süß of Kulmbach had used Landsknechts to slay St. Ursula and her virgins, and in the same year, or the next, Altdorfer, who, with Dürer, Schäufelein, Süß and Huber was a major contributor to the nascent secular military genre, made one the executioner of St. Catherine.

Yet for all the momentum that was breaking down the division between the treatment of soldiers in secular and religious art, an inhibition remained. Germanic artists were working for an audience many of whom, while prepared to think ill of soldiers, had been, or could be, soldiers themselves, given the higher proportion of urban recruits in Switzerland and Germany than in Italy. There was, then, in martyrdom scenes a continuation of the distinction between soldier and executioner. In his *Beheading of the Baptist* (1515) at Kroměříž, Lucas Cranach the Elder (another exponent of secular military genre) went so far as to give the soldier who was present at, but not carrying out, the beheading his own features. A more frequent solution capitalized the fascination with the ostentatiously sloppy finery adopted by the Landsknechts by reversing an earlier tendency to show executioners and torturers as being simply and squalidly clad; from at least Cranach's own *Martyrdom of St. Catherine* of 1510, they are portrayed as dandies, wearing eccentric, but in colour, material, cut and well-filled codpiece, *haute couture* versions of the Landsknecht mode. And from this German beginning, picked up by Leonard Beck and others, the convention spread to Swiss painters, a notable example

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41 The illustrated Bartsch (New York, 1978- ), xvii. 91.
43 Friedrich Winkler, Hans von Kulmbach. Leben und Werk eines fränkischen Künstlers der Dürerzeit (Stadtarchiv Kulmbach, 1959), fig. 22.
Fig. 6
being the Dandy Executioner in Niklaus Manuel's *Beheading of the Baptist* in Basel (Fig. 6).

Though the genre interest in contemporary soldiers which registered so widely among Germanic artists of the early sixteenth century probably helped to keep the classicizing time-determinant at bay, there were a few works, like Holbein the Younger's Basel altarpiece of about 1524, that introduced fairly carefully copied Roman soldiers into the familiar mix of variations on costumes secular, military and near eastern of indeterminate date. Far more representative, however, of the bringing of the temporal layers of costume reference towards the surface of the present was Georg Lemberger's Leipzig *Crucifixion* of roughly the same date. For all the classical hints that inform the tabernacle at which its donors pray, this presses the Passion moment forward in time, with its up-to-date modish Longinus, his Nuremberg civil servant lance-helper, and the slashed yellow Landsknecht hose of the bad malefactor on Christ's left. It was a pressure that ensured that when the Reformation did not inhibit the production of religious art but came to foster an iconic version of it, these would relate New Testament time directly to the present, as in the Good Centurion of 1529 from Cranach's studio who spells it out for us again, "Truly, this was the son of God", as he rides in feathered hat and contemporary cavalryman's plate beneath the cross.

In Switzerland and Germany the advance of naturalistically portrayed common soldiers from secular prints into religious painting took place during the period of northern intervention in the 1494-1529 Wars of Italy. And it was during the first three decades of the sixteenth century that, under the influence of more or less constant warfare, and exposure to northern soldiers and prints (for there was no parallel development of military genre in the south), they took their place in the religious art of Italy.

In his *Treatise on architecture* of c.1460-64, Filarete had pleaded with artists to avoid anachronism: "if you have to do a thing that represents the present time, do not dress your figures in the antique fashion. In the same way, if you have to represent antiquity, do not dress them in modern dress". Buttressed by

45 *Kunst der Reformationszeit*, op. cit., p. 324.
46 Staatsgalerie, Aschaffenburg. "Warlich diser mensch ist gotes son gewest".
Fig. 7
Romanino. *Christ shown to the people.* Detail. Cremona, Cathedral.
humanistic interest in ancient history and relief sculpture, this point of view had led, as we have seen, to works that Romanized New Testament and martyrdom scenes. This was not a consistent approach. Perugino’s *St. Michael* in the Brera shows him as a Roman soldier. His *St. Michael* in the London National Gallery wears a fine contemporary suit of Milanese plate. The Pollaiuolo *Martyrdom of St. Sebastian*, also in the National Gallery, combines carefully Roman architecture with observers in contemporary armour and executioners in ‘timeless’ undress. What was consistent in the Quattrocento was the exclusion of figures which would forcibly remind viewers of the contemporary infantryman, the most representative figure even in armies that retained strong contingents of cavalry. Where scenes were set in the present and had to contain foot soldiers, a convention was adopted which showed them as neat, bland figures incapable of arousing disturbing associations.

When firmly of-this-moment soldiers figured in crucifixion scenes from the turn of the century it was to show Calvary as a place of military assembly. But this militarized Calvary was commonly removed from the foreground space, the most immediate and potentially the most disturbing. This was given to a meditative ‘timeless’ group while the modern troops clustered around about the crosses on a distant hill, as in Signorelli’s *Lamentation* of 1502 in Cortona, or Romanino’s *Pietà* of 1510 in the Venetian Accademia. In another solution, soldiers who would be instantly recognizable as those passing through the viewers’ cities or billeted among their villages were kept on the fringes of the subject: Lotto’s pikeman waving a party of Jews towards the *Deposition*; Previtali’s contemporary horse and foot filing away home in his c.1520 *Crucifixion* in the Accademia.

The modernization of the ‘distant Calvary’ convention was above all the work of artists working in northern Italy, the chief war zone, and the area most responsive to Germanic military prints and, perhaps, to northern ‘realistic’ religious sentiment. Conspicuous in this respect are works like Romanino’s concerned, utterly contemporary image of the presentation by a soldier of the scarred Christ to the people yelling for his death (Fig. 7), or Cariani’s jostling *Way to Calvary* in the Ambrosiana, Milan, of

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Fig. 8
c.1520 with its prominent Landsknecht figure (significantly, the painting was once attributed to Dürer)\textsuperscript{49}. And the martyrdom scenes which most vividly suggest contemporary atrocities are, again, the works of north Italian artists, whether the gentle Vicentine Bartolommeo Montagna\textsuperscript{50} or the more savage Pordenone, whose \textit{Beheading of St. Paul} (Fig. 8) is, like Huber's \textit{Execution of the Baptist}, a quasi-journalistic report on a violent incident in a provincial town\textsuperscript{51}.

This partial absorption into religious art of the contemporary soldiery is, given the bias against actuality that had characterized Italian art since the late trecento, remarkable. Blending later into the energetic spirit of Counter-Reformation, it helped to quell the antiquarian take-over of early Christian history. But the mongrelizing influence of 'timelessness' continued, as did the aesthetic cult of nudity and the unspecific costume-veilings of it that characterize such works as Michelangelo's \textit{Crucifixion of St. Peter} in the Vatican.

What, then, can be said for the value of this subject?

It can increase an interest in religious narrative and enhance an appreciation of pictorial time-determinants. It focuses attention on the relationship between art and experience. And it throws some light, at least, on the relationship between the aesthetic and devotional stances of Germanic and southern artists, and the extent to which the period brought some closing of the gap between them.

\textsuperscript{49} M.L. Ferrari, \textit{Il Romanino} (Milan, 1901), pl. 34; Rodolfo Palluchini and Francesco Rossi, \textit{Giovanni Cariani} (Bergamo, 1983), pl. xlii. The date is in considerable doubt (p. 128).

\textsuperscript{50} Lionello Puppi, \textit{Bartolomeo Montagna} (Venice, 1962), 'Punishment of S. Biagio', pl. 123 and 'Martyrdom of St. Paul', pl. 183.