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## 17, The Crucifixion

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*The Crucifixion*  
Shawn Peralta

The Crucifixion is one of nineteen uncolored full-page illustrations from this Book of Hours produced by Thielman Kerver. Printed on parchment, the large metalcut was made by Jean Pichore. The leaf appears within the Hours of the Holy Cross (sig. r1 – r3) towards the end of the book. It anchors the Octave of Easter in April that celebrates the passion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Octaves are eight-day periods known as solemnities in the liturgical calendar and include a major feast.<sup>1</sup> The image comprises of several components: first, shown from the top is Jesus and the thieves; second, near the middle is a city in the foreground with an ominous dark sky; third, towards the bottom is the Virgin Mary, Mary Magdalene and St. John; and fourth, at the very bottom is a Latin inscription.



*Figure 1. Jesus (center), flanked by Dysmas (left) and Gestas (right), are crucified on individual crosses.*

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<sup>1</sup> Miller, "The Easter Octave."

At the top of the image is Jesus, whose position in the middle creates the balance and symmetry of everything around him. He leans to his right, eyes closed and head lowered suggesting the moment of death. His face is filled with discomfort and pain alluding to the message of sacrifice and suffering depicted in the Passion. In earlier Byzantine depictions Jesus was shown wearing a crown with his eyes open as the triumphant Savior, but in later Gothic and Renaissance editions he is shown wearing a crown of thorns as in this version.

Above His head is a sign with the letters “INRI,” an abbreviation for *Iesvs Nazarenvs Rex Ivdaeorvm*, which translates to Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews. Around His waist is a wrapped loin cloth that blows freely in the wind. Behind Jesus are two men crucified on separate crosses, they can be identified as the criminals mentioned in the Book of Luke: “When they came to the place called The Skull, they crucified Him there, along with the criminals, one on His right and the other on His left.”<sup>3</sup> Older depictions of Jesus crucifixion were much simpler and did not include these two thieves. They were introduced with the New Testament from the Gospel of Nicodemus which added new elements, known as the Acts of Pilate.



*Figure 2. Magnified view of angel embracing the soul of Dysmas.*

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<sup>3</sup> Wright Translation, New Testament, Luke 23:33



*Figure 3. Magnified view of Gestas having his soul dragged by a demon.*

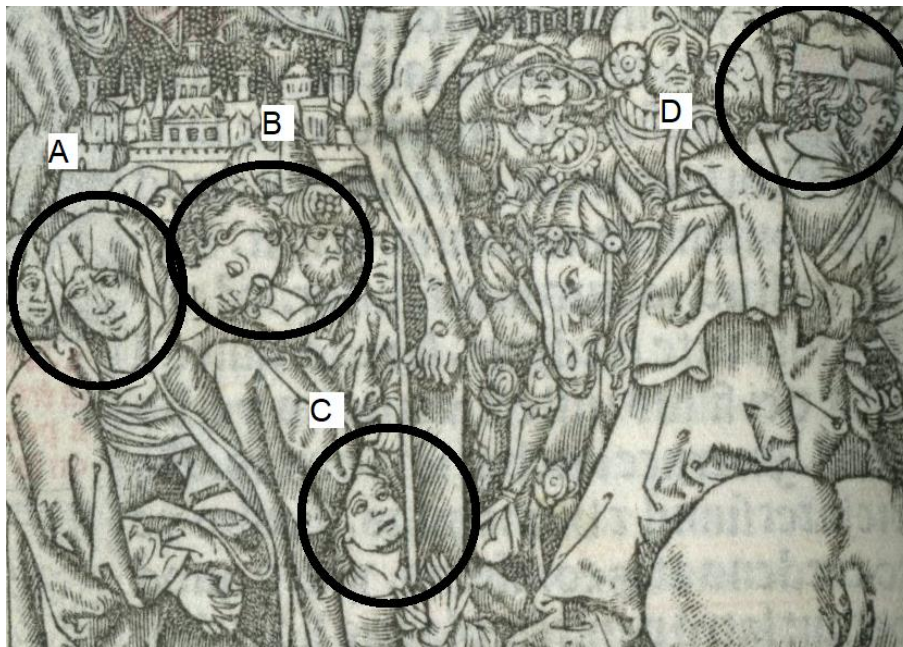


*Figure 4. The city of Jerusalem in the foreground.*

The New Testament indicates Jesus was crucified in a spot called Golgotha outside the city of Jerusalem during the day; the image instead shows the sky blackened by darkness which is an allegory to the Christian Church and Jewish Synagogue (good vs evil) alluding to the crime of decide committed by the Jews.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Perry and Schweitzer, 4



*Figure 5. Virgin Mary (A), St. John (B), Mary Magdalene (C), and unknown figure (D) witnessing the crucifixion of Jesus.*

Near the bottom of the image are three prominent figures Virgin Mary, Mary Magdalene, and St. John. In this image Pichore also includes a mysterious figure on horseback. Note how Mary Magdalene is in the middle dividing the two spaces between Virgin Mary and St. John with the mysterious figure.



*Figure 6. The Chalice of Magdalene shown in the foreground at the base of the cross.*

Also note the container at the base of the cross. However, in this version it is the vessel of ointment, traditionally associated with Mary Magdalene, in reference to the Anointing of Jesus. Placed at the foot of the cross, it can also allude to the Holy Grail, used to collect the blood of Jesus.



*Figure 7. Latin inscription with colored monograms flanked by two miniatures at bottom of illustration.*

At the bottom is Psalm 50:17 from the Latin Vulgate Bible, which is attributed to St. Jerome: “Domine labia mea aperies et os meum annuntiabit laudem tuam,” which translates, “O Lord, open my lips and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise.”

In conclusion, the image of the Crucifixion in the Book of Hours can thus be seen to provide the visual context for locating the Octave of Easter in the liturgical calendar being the most depicted image within the iconography of the Passion of Jesus.

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