SUPPLEMENTI

Immagini controverse

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IL CAPITALE CULTURALE
Studies on the Value of Cultural Heritage

eum

Rivista fondata da Massimo Montella

Il capitale culturale
Studies on the Value of Cultural Heritage
Supplementi n. 19, 2025

ISSN 2039-2362 (online)
ISBN cartaceo 979-12-5704-038-3
ISBN PDF 979-12-5704-039-0

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Registrazione al Roc n. 735551 del 14/12/2010

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Layout editor studio editoriale Oltrepagina

Progetto grafico / Graphics +crocevia / studio grafico

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Rakić I.Č., The "controversial" image of the Jews. The case of the parish church of Saint George in Lovran
«Il capitale culturale», Supplemento n. 19 (2025), pp. 25-53
ISSN 2039-2362 (online); DOI: 10.13138/2039-2362/3830

The "controversial" image of the Jews. The case of the parish church of Saint George in Lovran

Ivana Čapeta Rakić*

Abstract

In the town of Lovran, located on the eastern coast of the Istrian peninsula, three late medieval churches are adorned with Gothic frescoes. These include the parish church of St. George, the church of St. John the Baptist, and the church of the Holy Trinity. The subject of research in this paper focuses on the frescoes in the church of St. George, specifically the images on the northern wall. In the iconography of the paintings, the author recognizes anti-Jewish symbolism that had hitherto gone unnoticed and unstudied at this location. The author substantiates the hypothesis of anti-Jewish iconography in the frescoes with evidence drawn from the contemporary reception of the images, specifically through the interpretation of graffiti inscribed by worshippers. Written in Glagolitic script, these graffiti—particularly those of an offensive nature—were directed at the negative figures portrayed in the frescoes.

Nella città di Lovran, situata sulla costa orientale della penisola istriana, tre chiese tardo medievali sono adornate con affreschi gotici: la chiesa parrocchiale di San Giorgio, la chiesa di San Giovanni Battista e la chiesa della Santissima Trinità. Questo articolo si concentra sugli affreschi della chiesa di San Giorgio, nello specifico sulle immagini sulla

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parete settentrionale. Nell'iconografia di questi dipinti, l'autore riconosce un simbolismo antiebraico che fino ad ora era passato inosservato in questa località. L'autore sostiene l'ipotesi che i dipinti siano antiebraici attraverso analizzando la coeva ricezione delle immagini, in particolare mediante l'interpretazione dei graffiti incisi dai fedeli. Scritti in alfabeto glagolitico, questi graffiti – soprattutto quelli di natura offensiva – erano rivolti alle figure negative rappresentate negli affreschi.

1. *Introduction: Historical and Ecclesiastical Circumstances of Medieval Istria in Relation to the Jews – A Brief Overview*

The town of Lovran is situated on the western coast of the Istrian Peninsula. From the mid-15th century, it was leased to the captain of Pazin and soon became an integral part of the Pazin County, a key stronghold of Habsburg rule in Istria and an essential component of the broader feudal system[1]. In its narrower definition, the county comprised hereditary estates under direct Habsburg control, administered by a captain residing in Pazin Castle. Historical sources refer to this region by various names: in German documents, it appears as *Grafschaft Mitterburg*, while Italian sources use *Contea di Pisino* or *stato Archiducale*. The strategic position of the Pazin County within the Habsburg Empire was of particular significance, as it marked the frontier with the Venetian Republic, which controlled much of the Istrian coastline. This division of the peninsula between Venetian and Habsburg rule had profound and lasting consequences for the cultural, economic, political, and religious development of the region. While Venetian territories thrived on maritime trade and urban expansion, Habsburg-controlled estates, including the Pazin County, remained predominantly agrarian and feudal in structure. They were shaped by strong Germanic influences, particularly in governance, noble landownership, and cultural and religious policies, which reinforced the distinct character of the inland regions in contrast to their coastal counterparts. The political and economic boundaries between Venetian and Habsburg Istria did not align with the borders of dioceses or monastic provinces. This small region was home to as many as four bishops: those of Pula, Poreč, Trieste, and Pićan. Lovran belonged to the Diocese of Pula, which had its episcopal seat in the city of Pula and was politically under Venetian administration[2]. Due to these political, cultural, and religious circumstances, the Pazin County became a site of intense interaction between various ethnic and social groups. This diversity

[1] Bradanović 2010, p. 220.

[2] In the 16th century, apostolic visitors were prohibited from traveling through the Austrian part of Istria and conducting visitations, leaving no historical records about the appearance of churches in that region. Cf. Joksimović 2023, p. 26.

left a lasting impact on the region's architecture, visual arts, and local customs, making the Pazin County a distinctive space within the broader context of late medieval Istria and Central European history. In this area, the presence of Jews is recorded in numerous documents, mostly referring to their activities within Venetian territories, where they could conduct various businesses more freely[3]. The toponym Žudetići (Ital. Zudetti) may indicate their presence in the municipality of Vižinada, as historical documents often use the term *zudetti* to refer to local Jewish moneylenders or individuals engaged in financial activities, particularly within Jewish communities under Venetian rule. Given their widespread presence throughout the Empire, it is plausible that Jews also resided in the Habsburg part of Istria. Historical sources confirm their presence in Opatija and Rijeka[4] at least until 1496-1497, when a decree expelled them from Habsburg regions such as Styria, Carinthia, and Carniola[5]. This expulsion reflects a hostile attitude towards them within the Empire.

The Istrian peninsula was also affected by the Lutheran Reformation in the 16th century[6]. In this context, a noteworthy detail emerges from the year 1580, when the Bishop of Verona, Agostino Valier, conducted the first apostolic visitation of the Diocese of Pula. However, he weas not allowed to enter areas under Austrian jurisdiction, and some of the subjects had to come to the Venetian territory. During this visit, he posed the following questions to the interviewees: whether the papal bull *In Coena Domini* was announced annually and whether there were any publicly acknowledged *consortes* (paramours) or heretics. It should be noted that the *In Coena Domini* bull, issued every year on Holy Thursday, included a list of prohibited behaviours carrying the threat of ecclesiastical excommunication, with heresy at the forefront. The witnesses informed Bishop Valier that the bull was indeed read and proclaimed and that there were no Jews. The specific mention of Jews as a paradigm for heresy is particularly significant. Additionally, the witnesses noted that the distinguished bishop had ordered the removal of graves[7].

2. *Frescoes in the Church of St. George: Style and Patrons*

In the Church of St. George, frescoes adorn the sanctuary and both sides of the triumphal arch that separates it from the nave (fig. 1). Dominating the

[3] Dobrovšak 2013, pp. 9-23.
[4] Morgani 2006.
[5] Dobrovšak 2013, p. 12.
[6] Ćutić Gorup 2012.
[7] The statement does not specify which tombs are being referred to or their location. It is only the context that suggests they were Jewish tombs. Cf. Joksimović 2023, pp. 139, 149.

main panels between the ribs of the sanctuary's vault are depictions of Christ and St. George, the church's patron saint. Surrounding Christ in the adjacent vaulted sections are the evangelists, while angels embellish the remaining spaces. The left, or northern, wall of the presbytery is divided into three vertical panels by stone consoles supporting the ribs of the sanctuary's ribbed star vault. The first panel is entirely dedicated to a single scene, while the other two are separated by a horizontal painted band, resulting in a total of four distinct scenes. The horizontal painted band extends continuously across the eastern and southern walls of the sanctuary. However, the vertical distribution of the scenes is rhythmic only in the upper part of the wall due to the width of the corbels and sub-ribs, while the lower part follows a different, irregular rhythm in its vertical distribution. On the northern wall, the scenes depict the Crucifixion, Resurrection, Ascension (in the upper register), and the Eucharistic Christ, along with the so-called Eucharistic miracle in the lower register. These frescoes have suffered significant damage, as the sanctuary wall was opened during Baroque extensions to create a passage to the newly constructed sacristy. Additionally, a Baroque *custodia* on the same wall has damaged the lower part of the fresco depicting the so-called Eucharistic miracle. It is presumed that the Baroque *custodia* replaced the Gothic one, which likely existed on the northern wall, probably in the location of the Baroque passage to the sacristy[8] (fig. 2). Simultaneously, the frescoes were overpainted with new layers of paint featuring stencil decorations, further contributing to their deterioration[9].

On the eastern wall, the upper register of the first segmented section depicts individual saints and holy women, while the other two sections portray the Virgin Mary with Child and her coronation. The upper register concludes on the southern wall with the scene of Christ's Birth. The lower register of both the eastern and southern walls is more iconographically consistent, presenting seven scenes of the martyrdom of St. George. This continuity is interrupted by a section on the southern wall depicting the moon and the sun. On the inner side of the triumphal arch, the Last Judgment is depicted, while the *intrados* of the arch features Jesse's Tree, and the outer side of the arch shows the Annunciation. The frescoes, dating from 1470 to 1479, are attributed to the Kastav painting school[10]. The Kastav Painting School refers to a group of masters and workshops that decorated churches in Istria, the Croatian Littoral, and parts of Slovenia during the late 15th and early 16th centuries. It emerged within a specific geopolitical context, divided between the Republic of Venice

[8] Bistrović 2017, p. 104.

[9] Krulić 2016, p. 237.

[10] On the fresco depicting Christ's Crucifixion, the year 1479 is inscribed, and it is taken as the *terminus ante quem* for the creation of the frescoes. Cf. Fučić 1982, p. 237; Bistrović 2017, pp. 13, 190.

and the Habsburg Monarchy, which influenced its style and iconography. Stylistically, the school is linked to contemporary German, South Tyrolean, and Czech painting traditions, while iconographically, the influence of German and Dutch prints, particularly the Biblia Pauperum, is evident[11]. As a result, its frescoes reflect the features of Gothic realism, with narrative compositions and expressive figures, often with exaggerated, caricature-like faces. The characters display heightened emotions, in line with the late medieval tendency toward dramatizing religious themes. The most prominent painter of the Kastav School was Vincent of Kastav, who created one of the most significant fresco cycles in this part of Europe in the Church of St. Mary on Škrilinah in Beram (1474)[12]. Vincent of Kastav also contributed to the paintings in the Church of St. George in Lovran[13]. In addition to being connected through the same workshop that painted both fresco cycles, Beram and Lovran are also united by the same group of patrons. The frescoes in Beram were commissioned by Jakov Raunacher, the Pazin captain[14]. His role as a patron is also recognized in the frescoes of Lovran, where the coats of arms of the Raunacher, Pramperg, Wachsenstein, Tattenbach (?), Herberstein, and Habsburg families are prominently displayed on the vault of the sanctuary in the Church of St. George[15]. Furthermore, both fresco cycles reveal distinct iconographic influences, notably the Biblia Pauperum and anti-Jewish imagery, which were common during this period[16]. These elements reflect the broader cultural and religious narratives that shaped the visual representation of biblical stories, marking the works not only as artistic achievements but also as expressions of the social and ideological currents of the time.

3. *Crucifixion: the fresco on the northern wall of the presbytery*

The first painting on the northern wall depicts the Crucifixion, illustrating multiple events simultaneously connected to Christ's crucifixion and death[17] (fig. 4). In this densely populated composition, the prominently raised central cross stands out, nearly reaching the top of the arched end of the wall. The

[11] Bistrović 2017.
[12] Fučić 1992.
[13] Bistrović 2010, pp. 255-279; Bistrović 2017.
[14] Karbić 2014, pp. 25-34.
[15] Bistrović 2017, pp. 19-21.
[16] Čapeta Rakić, Capriotti 2022, pp. 43-56.
[17] In German historiography, this type of Crucifixion is referred to as *Kreuzigung im Gedräng*. It denotes the crowded type of Crucifixion, with a multitude of figures, in contrast to the version where only Christ on the Cross, Mary, and John are depicted. For the history and critique of the term, see: Opitz 2012, pp. 63-76.

cross consists of a vertical and a horizontal beam, to which the naked Christ is nailed, with his loins modestly covered by a loincloth, known as a *perizoma*. Christ's relatively upright body is rendered in a Gothic naive style, approaching caricature in some areas, particularly noticeable in the torso, which lacks anatomical accuracy[18]. His head is inclined to the right, with half-open eyes directed toward the group beneath the cross, suggesting that Christ is still alive. To the left and right of Christ, two crucified thieves are depicted. Unlike Christ, they are bound to crosses made of green logs. The thief on the right of Christ has his arms pulled backward, crossed over the crossbeam, and tied with ropes around the upper arms, while his feet are bound at the ankles. Next to his head is a small naked human figure with arms crossed over its chest, being greeted by an angel. On the opposite side, the bound thief is depicted in a completely contorted position, bent, and turned upside down, entirely disregarding the natural limitations of spinal extension[19]. A small human figure is depicted emerging from his body, being pulled toward the devil in this instance. This represents a common theme in medieval art, illustrating the human soul at the moment of death. Scrolls with inscriptions fill the heavenly space between the three crosses. However, the inscriptions are significantly damaged, making it impossible to determine with certainty what they once said[20]. The multitude gathered at the base of the crosses is divided into two groups, positioned on the left and right sides. To the right of Christ, a woman with long, loose red hair, embracing the cross, is identified as Mary Magdalene. Adjacent to her is a group of figures, with the Virgin Mary at its centre. The Virgin's posture, partially kneeling, reflects the onset of unconsciousness from the agony of witnessing her son's torture and death[21]. The painter symbolically underscores her sorrow with a sword piercing her chest[22]. Saint John and one of the Marys, likely Mary Cleopas, or Mary Salome, are depicted trying to prevent her fall by holding onto her upper arms. Above them, a man on horseback is shown, accompanied by another figure assisting in holding the spear that pierced Christ's side. On the right side of the scene, several male figures, mainly horsemen, are depicted with fluttering flags and intertwined spears. In the foreground, beneath and to the right of the cross, three men are shown casting lots for Christ's garment. The descrip-

[18] Eterović, Doričić 2012, pp. 185-212.

[19] *Ibidem*.

[20] Based on comparative examples, Željko Bistrović concludes that the texts of the scrolls contained paraphrases of Christ's words and the words of the thieves found in the Gospel of Luke. He believes that the inscription at the end of the right thief's speech read: «si filius dei es / salvum fac te nic (?) et ipsum», while at the end of the left thief's speech: «memento mei domine dum veneris», and «amen dico tibi / hodie mecum eris in paradiso», which refers to Christ's words. Cf. Bistrović 2017, p. 91.

[21] For *the swoon* of the Virgin see: Hamburgh 1981, pp. 45-75; Boon 2007, pp. 3-25.

[22] Schuler 1987; Schuler 1992, pp. 5-28.

tion of the artwork reveals a series of details indicating that several successive events are depicted simultaneously in the scene. For example, Christ's upright posture with his eyes open suggests that he is still alive on the cross. This is supported by the scene where soldiers gamble for his garments and the crowd gathered beneath the cross, taunting and mocking him. These events occurred before Christ's death, while the soldier piercing Jesus' side represents an event after his death. Similarly, the two thieves are depicted with open eyes and beaten shins, and their souls being taken by an angel and a devil suggests that death has already occurred.

4. *The "controversial" image and the Jews*

In terms of iconography, the fresco of the Crucifixion belongs to an allegorical and anachronistic representation. This is primarily evidenced by the presence of angels and demons receiving and carrying away the souls of the two thieves, the sword piercing the Virgin Mary's chest, and the physiognomy and clothing of the depicted protagonists, which are inconsistent with the historical period of the event. Additionally, the composition follows a traditional division, placing villains and negative characters on the right side (Christ's left), while positive figures are positioned on the left side (Christ's right). The central figure of the left group is the Virgin Mary, whose visual depiction of physical and spiritual anguish draws inspiration from apocryphal sources, Christian exegesis, and Franciscan piety and propaganda[23]. Her physical collapse began to appear in iconography from the 11th century and became widespread by the mid-13th century[24]. The sword piercing her chest symbolizes Simeon's words from the Gospel of Luke: «And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, 'Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed'»[25]. Based on the words from Luke's Gospel[26], an interpretation regarding the good and bad thieves also emerged. In apocryphal sources, they are named Dismas (the good thief) and Gestas (the bad thief)[27]. In the fresco, Gestas is depicted completely upside down, a feature typical of 15th-century Bavarian and Austrian paintings[28] or of artworks influenced by Bavarian and Austrian geographic, stylis-

[23] Capriotti 2014, p. 80.
[24] Neff 1998, pp. 254-273; Veratelli 2004, pp. 28-47.
[25] Luke 2, 34-35; Schuler 1987; Schuler 1992, pp. 5-28.
[26] Luke 23, 39-43.
[27] Nicodemus, IX, 5; X, 2
[28] Vignjević 2008, p. 35.; Merback 1999.

tic, or iconographic traditions. This iconographic pattern also appears in sub-Alpine regions of present-day Italy[29] as well as in Lovran, Croatia, suggesting the artists' reliance on Central European models[30] (fig. 5). The depiction of expressive, distorted, and contorted human bodies evoked strong emotions in the observer. This is attested by Antonio de Beatis, secretary, and companion to the Roman cardinal Luigi d'Aragona, during his journey to Germany, France, and the Netherlands in 1517, when he described «crucifixi revelatissimi e grandissimi (...) el che veramente induce non meno terrore che devozione»[31]. In his book *The Thief, the Cross and the Wheel: Pain and the Spectacle of Punishment in Medieval and Renaissance Europe*, Mitchell B. Merback connects the depiction of the biblical thief hanging upside down with the medieval practice of punishing Jews in German territories, where public executions by hanging them upside down were carried out. Regarding this shocking practice, Merback highlights a written testimony dated June 24, 1434, by Andrea Gattaro from Padua, the Venetian delegate to the Council of Basel, who witnessed such an event. Gattaro wrote: «In Basel, two German Jews were detained as thieves. They were at once put on the rack and confessed. After they had been granted the customary respite to prepare their defence, they were repeatedly urged to convert to Christianity, so as not to die like beasts. Eventually, one of them converted and was baptized. When the time came for their execution, they were led into the city hall, where, as was customary, the charges were read to them, and they were sentenced. The one who had become a Christian was ordered to be led out and beheaded, whereas the Jew was condemned to be hanged by the feet with a dog beside him»[32]. Artistic representations of the upside-down crucified thief can be seen, for example, in a painting created around 1450 by an unknown master for the parish church in Hallstatt, Austria, or in another work by an unidentified master dating to around 1470 for the Church of St. Leonard in Wasserburg[33]. In many cases, such as the example from Hallstatt or the *Calvary Triptych* (circa 1420) in the Germanisches Nationalmuseum in Nuremberg, Gestas is depicted with his head or entire body turned away from Christ. This positioning further underscores the condemned thief's negative nature, his persistent refusal to acknowledge the truth and divine nature of Christ, symbolizing Gestas's metaphorical blindness. Through their posture and manner of depiction, the two thieves can also be interpreted as forming an antithetical rela-

[29] See, for example, the Crucifixion in the cathedral in Bressanone, located in the province of Trentino-Alto Adige/South Tyrol.

[30] The same iconographic pattern also appears in the South Tyrolean or Subalpine region, which is equally influenced by Central European artistic tendencies.

[31] Citation according to: Wenderholm 2013, p. 62.

[32] Glanz 1943, pp. 3-26.

[33] Merback 1999.

tionship akin to the personifications of the Church and the Synagogue in Crucifixion imagery[34]. In the Church of St. Catherine in Lindar near Pazin, an example of two personifications in an antithetical relationship can be observed. They are represented within the explicitly anti-Jewish theme of the *Living Cross*, where the Synagogue is depicted on the right side, blindfolded to symbolize the spiritual blindness of the Jews. Consequently, she is portrayed as punished and demonized, while Ecclesia is shown as blessed[35]. On the right side of the fresco in Lovran, soldiers and men who verbally mocked Christ are also depicted. Some soldiers are dressed in medieval-style military armour and are portrayed neutrally, without notable gestures or facial expressions. In contrast, the horsemen in the forefront are assigned a series of derogatory attributes. One man wears headgear resembling a helmet, but since it is dark red, it is more likely a Jewish round hat with a narrow brim and a spherical tip. This interpretation is supported by the headgear of the adjacent man, which appears typically Mediterranean—specifically, a conical hat with a turban-like lower part. This type of headgear was commonly used in depictions of Jews, but also Muslims, in 15th-century European paintings[36]. A similar type of cap can be seen in the painting *Christ among the Doctors* in the Church of St. Mary in Beram, where it is worn by one of the Jewish scribes depicted in dispute with the twelve-year-old Jesus[37]. On the beard of this elder, someone engraved an inscription in Glagolitic script that reads: «OVO E SLIPCIA Z TRABE» (This is a blind man from Traba)[38]. These and other offensive graffiti aimed at the scribes reveal how such images were perceived by the public: the scribe was interpreted as a blind Jew, unable to properly understand the true message of the Old Testament. Metaphorical blindness is, therefore, one of the key elements in interpreting iconography with anti-Jewish motifs. On the left side of the fresco, the moment of Christ's side being pierced with a spear is depicted. According to canonical sources, this act was performed by a soldier while another witnessed it. In the *Gospel of Nicodemus* (also known as *Acta Pilati*), dating from the 4th or the 5th century, and the much later *Golden Legend* from the 13th century, the soldier is named Longinus[39]. In the fresco from Lovran, the two figures are not shown in military attire but are instead dressed in medieval contemporary clothing. Longinus is depicted wearing a

[34] Ruth Melinkoff also wrote about the antithetical relationship between the two thieves. See: Mellinkoff 1993, pp. 214-215.

[35] Čapeta Rakić, Capriotti 2022, pp. 43-56.

[36] Bernhard Blumenkranz wrote about the "Orientalization" of Jews. See: Blumenkranz 2003.

[37] Čapeta Rakić, Capriotti 2022, pp. 43-56.

[38] Traba is a small village in vicinity to Beram. It was also included within the territory of the Pazin County.

[39] Voragine 1900, pp. 70-73, Frugoni 2010, p. 172; Orsola, 2017.

long purple tunic without a head covering, while the other figure wears a green tunic and a red hat. Longinus faces Christ, while the other figure faces Longinus with his back turned to Christ. Together, they hold the spear with which they pierce Christ's side. The assistance of the second soldier in holding the spear is interpreted as a consequence of Longinus's blindness, as he was unable to independently direct the blade into Christ's side and required help[40]. Longinus's infirmity plays a key role in shaping a miraculous narrative. Beginning with a group of Irish Gospel books from the 7th and 8th centuries, the story emerges of his blindness being healed by the fluids flowing from the wound he had inflicted on the Redeemer's side. This iconography, therefore, originates from extensive exegesis and the Golden Legend, which also recounts Longinus's blindness[41]. The healing of his eyes is also metaphorically interpreted as Longinus's conversion[42]. Notably, in this depiction, the convert is not portrayed as a Roman soldier but rather as a converted Jew, which explains the absence of the military roman armour as well as the defamatory attribute of the Jewish cap on his head. When analysing the Lovran painting, which undeniably conveys anti-Jewish undertones, it is crucial to examine the portrayal of the central figure within the group of men on the right. His face is intentionally exaggerated and depicted with negative features. Notably, his disproportionately large nose is made to resemble an animal's snout, specifically a pig's snout, which he indicates with his index finger (fig. 6). It is widely recognized that pigs, along with camels, badgers, and hares, are forbidden in Jewish dietary laws[43]. Of these animals, the pig has historically been the most contentious in Christian-Jewish discourse. Christian interpretations often assign a moral dimension to these dietary laws, linking the pig with various vices. For instance, Isidore of Seville suggests that the Latin word for pig, "porcus", derives from "spurcus", meaning unclean[44]. Furthermore, Rabanus Maurus emphasized a negative association between Jews and pigs, attributing characteristics like lust, wantonness, and gluttony to the animal[45]. Since these traits were interpreted as shared between the Jew and the pig, the pig became a familiar image in medieval Christian anti-Jewish polemics[46]. By endowing the figure with the physiognomy of a pig, this act deliberately employed a method of dehumanizing Jews, further adding an atmosphere of anti-Jewish iconography to the scene.

[40] Bath 2018, p. 3.

[41] Voragine 1900, p. 70-73. For Longinus's spiritual and physical blindness, see: Peebles 1911, pp. 37-43; Frugoni 2010, p. 172.

[42] For more on Longinus's conversion, see: Sorce, forthcoming.

[43] Refer to the Book of Leviticus, 11, 2-8 and Deuteronomy, 14, 6-8.

[44] Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, XX, 12.1.25.

[45] Rabanus Maurus, *De universo Lib. XXII*, Lib. VII, 206D.

[46] Resnick 2017, pp. 75-88.

One of the three figures casting lots for Christ's garments at the foot of the cross also has a nose resembling a pig's snout. Although the Gospels clearly state that Roman soldiers divided Christ's garments among themselves, the figures in the Lovran painting are not depicted with typical soldierly attributes but instead feature characteristics traditionally associated with Jews. Furthermore, the first figure, not only marred by an ugly face and a pig-like nose, is dressed in the attire of a court jester, and holds three dice in his hands. In the Bible, the fool is mentioned in Psalms 13 and 53 with the words: *Dixit insipiens in corde suo non est deus* (The fool says in his heart, there is no God)[47]. Reflecting this, the initial 'D' in these psalms is often illustrated with the image of a fool in numerous medieval psalters[48]. The figure of the jester can also be found among the crowd in the Crucifixion scenes, as pointed out by Michael Bath in his analysis of a 15th-century work located in the church at Fowlis Easter, Angus, a few miles west of Dundee. He also highlights several other examples of this motif found in St. Mary's Church in Dortmund and in the Salzwedel Church in Saxony. Bath justifies the presence of the jester specifically through the words of the Psalms[49].

The central figure of the group, casting lots for Christ's garments, is dressed in a yellow robe, which starting from the 12th century in the West, had increasingly negative associations attached to it. It began to be used to distinguish figures like Judas, in representations of the Synagogue, and for other characters with negative connotations[50]. Similarly, the third figure is clad in a tattered tunic and wears a fantastical yellow hat with two elongated side "ears".

5. *The contemporary reception of the image in the local context*

Within the sanctuary, there are a total of 48 graffiti written in Glagolitic script, with 39 of them inscribed onto the Crucifixion scene alone. Most of the graffiti relate to the inscription of alphabetical sequences, dates, the names of the writers, or self-referential messages that point to the act of writing itself or its executor[51].

For this topic, an intriguing graffiti inscription is found on the knee of the first figure casting lots for Christ's garment. It simply reads: SRAM (SHAME). It's not entirely clear what this derogatory term is criticizing; perhaps the nu-

[47] Psalms 13 and 53.
[48] Gifford, 1974, pp. 336-342.
[49] Bath, 2018, pp. 1-22.
[50] Petzold 2016, p. 451.
[51] Kapetanović 2011, pp. 425-434.

dity of the figure, as suggested by Fučić[52], or maybe the act of casting lots itself, implying gambling. While gambling wasn't strictly prohibited by law, it faced strong criticism from religious orders, especially preachers[53]. For example, Bernardine of Siena attributed the invention of dice to Lucifer, and a 14th-century French poem titled *Du Jeu de Déz* recounts how the devil persuaded a Roman senator to invent dice, explaining the symbolic meanings of the dots on each side: one in despite of God; two for spite of God and the Virgin Mary; three for the Trinity; four for the evangelists; five for the wounds of Christ; and six for the six days of Creation[54]. Gambling was also associated with the behaviour of gamblers, including drinking, physical violence, and swearing. As Rhiannon Purdie noted, the most common criticism of gambling wasn't necessarily the act of using dice but rather the blasphemous swearing and insults hurled by players when they lost. Literary depictions often portray players swearing violently by God, Mary, or the saints, expressing bitter anger when luck wasn't on their side[55]. A contemporary text from the 15th century written in Glagolitic script, discussing the Passion theme, states: *A ini ga b[ih] u za uši pestmi kako lotri kada pri zaru sêde* (And they struck him (Christ) on the ears with their fists, like gamblers when they sit at the dice). Besides the above, the term LOTAR may denote a general derogatory word used to curse individuals regardless of the vice. The same curse is carved three times on the figure of Herod in the Church of St. Mary in Beram, in the scene of the Massacre of the Innocents, with the intention of deliberately insulting the Jewish king[56].

Over the knees of the second and third "soldiers" casting lots in the Lovran fresco, an inscription reads: *Ja Luka pisah to na dan sv. Marije 1522* (I, Luka, wrote this on the day of St. Mary, 1522). Additionally, the word OSAL (ASS) is carved. It is unclear whether the latter was intended as an insult to Luka or to offend the person depicted. Referring to someone as an ass is a common animal insult, as seen in Aesop's fables, which ridicule the creature for its stubbornness, laziness, and comical appearance with long ears. It's noteworthy that the figure with the inscription wears a hat with "ears" reminiscent of a donkey's. Christian iconography also portrays the donkey as a symbol of stupidity and gluttony, associated with vices like Lust, Sloth, and Ignorance. Like the goat, the donkey is often linked to the Synagogue, symbolizing Jew-

[52] Fučić 1982, p. 235.

[53] Gambling and games of chance were strongly stigmatized by preachers. San Bernardino of Siena preached one series of sermons against gambling in Florence over Lent, 1424-25, in which he focused on the misuse of money it entails, but at other times he elaborates on the full blasphemous import of dicing. Cf. Purdie 2000, pp. 167-184.

[54] Mehl 1981, pp. 22-23.

[55] Purdie 2000, p. 176.

[56] Čupković 2013, pp. 123-141.

ish rejection of Christ. Gregory the Great compared Jewish blindness to the donkey's shortsightedness, a comparison echoed by other church writers[57]. In the Lindar painting, the Synagogue is depicted riding a donkey. The Glagolitic inscription OSAL (ASS) also appears in graffiti at the Church of the Holy Trinity in Hrastovlje, on the fresco Christ before Pilate, also painted by Ivan from Kastav. The full inscription reads: «Ass. Do not beat, ass, that holy man who created heaven and earth and all things of this world and knows your thoughts, that creator of yours, and you treat him in such a way!»

In the 16th century, a vivid inscription appears against the dark green background, positioned just to the right of the fifth soldier's heel on the Crucifixion fresco in Lovran. It reads: BUDI VERAN NE NEVERAN (Be faithful, not unfaithful). It remains unclear whether this message specifically targets Jews, or whether in this context, "Jews" are used metaphorically to denote heretics, particularly the Protestants whose influence was spreading across Istria during that era[58].

6. *Fresco of the so-called Eucharistic Miracle*

In the literature describing the frescoes on the north wall of the sanctuary, there is a scene referred to as "The Eucharistic Miracle". The scene, however, was not associated with any known local or global miracle involving the consecrated host; rather, it was thought to depict an unknown Eucharistic miracle[59]. On the left side of the composition of the fresco, a bishop is depicted, holding a monstrance. Behind him stands a group of soldiers clad in medieval armour. Facing the bishop is an elderly man with a long, grey beard, dressed in a red tunic and a purple cloak, and holding a staff. Behind the elderly man stand five visible figures, with implication of several others in the background. The first man directly behind the elder is clothed in a long yellow robe and wears a purple hat. Following him are two darker-skinned men adorned with conical hats in green and yellow, resembling upside-down funnels. Adjacent to them are two men, one sporting a purple cap. These two are extending their arms to catch white, round wafers that seem to be floating through the sky (fig. 7). Following the conducted research, it can be concluded that the scene does not depict any miracle of the host. It seems that the depiction of this unusual scene was created as a combination of two or more images, likely derived from woodcuts found in the *Biblia Pauperum*

[57] Germ 2006, pp. 153-154.
[58] Ćutić Gorup 2012.
[59] Bistrović 2017, p. 190.

or the *Speculum Humanae Salvationis*. Given the current state of research, it is impossible to precisely identify which editions served as models. It is possible that the source was a Bible printed in the Netherlands or Germany around 1465-1470[60], or perhaps one printed in Nuremberg by publisher Hans Spoerer in 1471[61].

Referring to page 18r from the Dutch edition (fig. 8), I suggest that the bishop figure on the left side of the Lovran fresco represents Melchizedek offering bread and wine to Abraham. However, in the process of adapting the model to the newly created composition, the figure of Abraham was omitted. This particular page of the *Biblia Pauperum* showcases three scenes in the central part: apart from the previously mentioned scene showing Melchizedek offering bread and wine to Abraham, the Last Supper and the Fall, along with the gathering of manna, are depicted. By comparing the scene on the Lovran fresco with the aforementioned graphic, it becomes evident that the right side of the composition portrays the gathering of manna. However, in the mentioned print, as well as in other related editions of the *Biblia Pauperum* depicting the manna gathering scene, Moses is consistently shown on the left side of the composition, facing right. Therefore, it seems plausible that the artist, in creating the Lovran composition, also drew upon a third image from the same printed source—possibly one depicting Moses and the Israelites in the scene of the Bronze Serpent on page 25v. (fig. 9). Here, Moses is depicted wearing a long robe and holding a staff. Surrounding him, both beside and behind, is a group of men, the Israelites, some of whom wear hats resembling upside-down funnels, much like those seen in the Lovran painting[62]. These funnel-shaped hats are among the most recognizable attributes assigned to Jews in medieval iconography. They are particularly prevalent in regions where Germanic languages are spoken, but they are not exclusive to these areas. Such hats are commonly depicted on the heads of biblical Jews in both the Old and New Testaments, regardless of their reputation[63].

[60] One of the copies available in digital format is preserved at The Morgan Library (PML 1.1-2). Available at: <https://www.themorgan.org/collection/blockbook/145328/18> and in National Library of Scotland. Avaible at <https://digital.nls.uk/rise-of-literacy/archive/172946959#?c=0&m=0&s=0&cv=25&xywh=5063%2C1204%2C1661%2C1231>, 22.01.2025.

[61] One of the copies available in digital form is preserved in the Princeton University Library. Available at: <https://dpul.princeton.edu/scheide/catalog/ht24wj49c>, 22.01.2025.

[62] I shared the hypothesis regarding the origin of the Lovran composition, based on prints from the *Biblia Pauperum*, with Professor Miri Rubin, author of numerous books, among which her titles *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (1991) and *Gentile Tales: The Narrative Assault on Late Medieval Jews* (1999) are particularly significant for this topic. I also shared the same thoughts with my colleague Željko Bistrović, who defended his doctoral thesis in 2017 on the topic of the Kastav painting school—problems of genesis and style. I am grateful to both colleagues for their enthusiastic reception of my hypothesis.

[63] Mellinkoff 1993, p. 66.

Melchizedek is depicted in the said Bible, much like in the Lovran painting, with attributes characteristic of a Catholic priest. In the printed illustration, he holds a chalice and host instead of wine and bread. This symbolic transformation of the Old Testament Jewish priest and king into a Catholic bishop is even more pronounced in the Lovran fresco, where he holds a monstrance in his hands. The origins of the iconographic representation of Melchizedek as a Catholic priest are rooted in a long Christian exegesis tradition, as even St. Ambrose referred to Melchizedek as the author of the sacrament. Consequently, his visual representation became integrated into church texts, such as in the initial letter of the words "Te igitur" in the canon of the Mass, solidifying his connection to the "priest of God Most High" with Christian priesthood[64]. Such an interpretation is also based on Psalm 110 (109):4 – «You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek!» – a text also referenced by St. Paul in the Letter to the Hebrews 7:17. It's worth noting that this psalm is included in the prayers and invocations recited and sung during the liturgy of the feast of Corpus Christi.

So, how to interpret the fresco in Lovran? Undoubtedly, it serves as propaganda for the Eucharist and the doctrine of transubstantiation, the belief in the real presence of Christ's body in the consecrated host, and the faith in salvation through it. The sacrifice of Melchizedek and the Gathering of Manna are some of the most frequently used iconographic themes in sacrament chapels[65], while the theme of the Bronze Serpent prefigures Christ's sacrifice on the cross. However, by combining these scenes into a unified image on the wall of the Lovran church, it creates an impression of strong propaganda for the conversion of Jews, as a Catholic bishop holds a monstrance with the consecrated host before them while they reach out for the hosts. It is worth mentioning that the doctrine of transubstantiation often sparked debates even among Catholic believers, and to defend and propagate it, the "external" enemy, namely the Jews, was often used, portrayed as the main desecrators of the host[66]. Acceptance of the host by the Jews in this manner was intended to further strengthen the faith in Christ and the power of the Eucharist among the Catholic faithful, and to promote conversion among those who were not believers.

[64] Rubin 1991, pp. 129-131.

[65] Cope 1979, pp. 188-189.

[66] The most famous example of the profanation of the Host is undoubtedly depicted on the predella painted by Paolo Uccello for the Pala del Corpus Domini, which is now housed in the Galleria Nazionale delle Marche in Urbino. This predella has been the subject of numerous studies. See, for example: Francastel 1952, pp. 180-191; Rubin 1999, pp. 40-48; Rubin 1992, pp. 169-185; Capriotti 2014, pp. 60-69.

7. *Eucharistic Christ*

The propaganda of the Eucharist in the fresco cycle should also be supported by the fact that between the described scene of the Crucifixion and the so-called Eucharistic miracle, there was a representation of the Eucharistic Christ. Unfortunately, very little of it remains preserved today; only the right hand of Christ. The specificity of this fragment is that a vine tendril and a sheaf of wheat pass through Christ's palm. Such an iconographic representation of Christ/Imago pietatis is relatively rare. In her seminal work dedicated to representations of the Eucharistic Christ, Dora Sallay identified only three such iconographic examples, while Željko Bistrović found several more and emphasized that the majority of this iconographic type is found precisely in the regions of Carinthia and Slovenia[67].

8. *Conclusion*

The analysis of the case study, focusing on the iconography of the frescoes on the northern wall of the sanctuary in the parish church of St. George in Lovran, Istria, reveals several key factors: that in Lovran, as well as in other Istrian towns under the territorial control of the Austrian Habsburg family, anti-Jewish iconography is present. This is expressed through a variety of iconographic themes, among which the Crucifixion of Christ, the so-called Eucharistic miracle, and Eucharistic Christ have been singled out for this occasion. In the Crucifixion scene, numerous iconographic attributes traditionally associated with Jews in visual art are identifiable as elements of anti-Jewish iconography. These include various head coverings such as Jewish hats and caps, the metaphorical blindness of Longinus, and the depiction of a bad thief crucified upside down, as well as the caricatured portrayal of negative biblical figures whose noses resemble pig snouts, yellow-coloured clothing, and so on. To support the interpretation of the frescoes within the context of anti-Jewish iconography, several contemporary offensive inscriptions carved by the faithful on the images—particularly on those figures with negative roles—are presented. The analysis also highlights the strong influence of German and Alpine painting, as well as the contemporary print, especially the *Biblia Pauperum*. Its impact is most clearly visible in the scene depicting the so-called Eucharistic miracle, which this analysis suggests was created through a combination of two or three different scenes taken from the printed media. This collage of scenes resulted in a distinctive and unique iconography that can be interpreted in the context of the vigorous promotion of belief in transubstantiation and conversion

[67] Bistrović 2017, p. 106.

through faith in Christ and His real presence in the consecrated host. The prominent Eucharistic iconography is further emphasized by the scene of Eucharistic Christ, positioned between the two aforementioned images, although its analysis is hindered by significant damage to the fresco. It's unlikely that these images were seen as controversial in the 15th century in the way we perceive them today. At the time, anti-Jewish imagery was common in European Christian art and generally accepted as part of the dominant religious and social narrative rather than something that would spark debate or outrage. For a medieval viewer, the frescoes in Lovran were probably not shocking or problematic but served as a visual reinforcement of Christian doctrine and societal norms. Depictions of Jews in a negative light—whether as Christ's tormentors or as non-believers—were widely used to strengthen Christian identity and justify the marginalization of Jewish communities. That being said, the presence of graffiti on the frescoes, including offensive inscriptions, suggests that these images did provoke reactions from viewers. However, rather than questioning the anti-Jewish themes, these reactions likely reflected and reinforced existing prejudices. The images were powerful and emotionally charged, but not controversial in the sense of being disputed or challenged. Today, we view these frescoes through a different lens, one shaped by modern awareness of antisemitism and its historical consequences. What we now recognize as deeply problematic was, in the 15th century, largely seen as an unremarkable part of religious and artistic tradition.

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Appendix

Fig. 1. View of the sanctuary of St. George's Church in Lovran (photo: Ivana Čapeta Rakić)

Fig. 2. View of the north wall of the sanctuary of St. George's Church in Lovran (photo courtesy of the Croatian Conservation Institute)

Fig. 3. View of the sanctuary vault of St. George's Church in Lovran, showing the coats of arms of donor families (photo: Ivana Čapeta Rakić)

Fig. 4. Fresco depicting the Crucifixion on the north wall of the sanctuary of St. George's Church in Lovran (photo courtesy of the Croatian Conservation Institute)

Fig. 5. Unknown German artist, woodcut depicting the Crucifixion, 15th century, Öeffentliche Kunstsammlung, Basel (photo from The Illustrated Bartsch)

Fig. 6. Fresco depicting the Crucifixion on the north wall of the sanctuary of St. George's Church in Lovran, detail (photo: Ivana Čapeta Rakić)

Fig. 7. Fresco depicting the so-called Eucharistic Miracle on the north wall of the sanctuary of St. George's Church in Lovran (photo courtesy of the Croatian Conservation Institute)

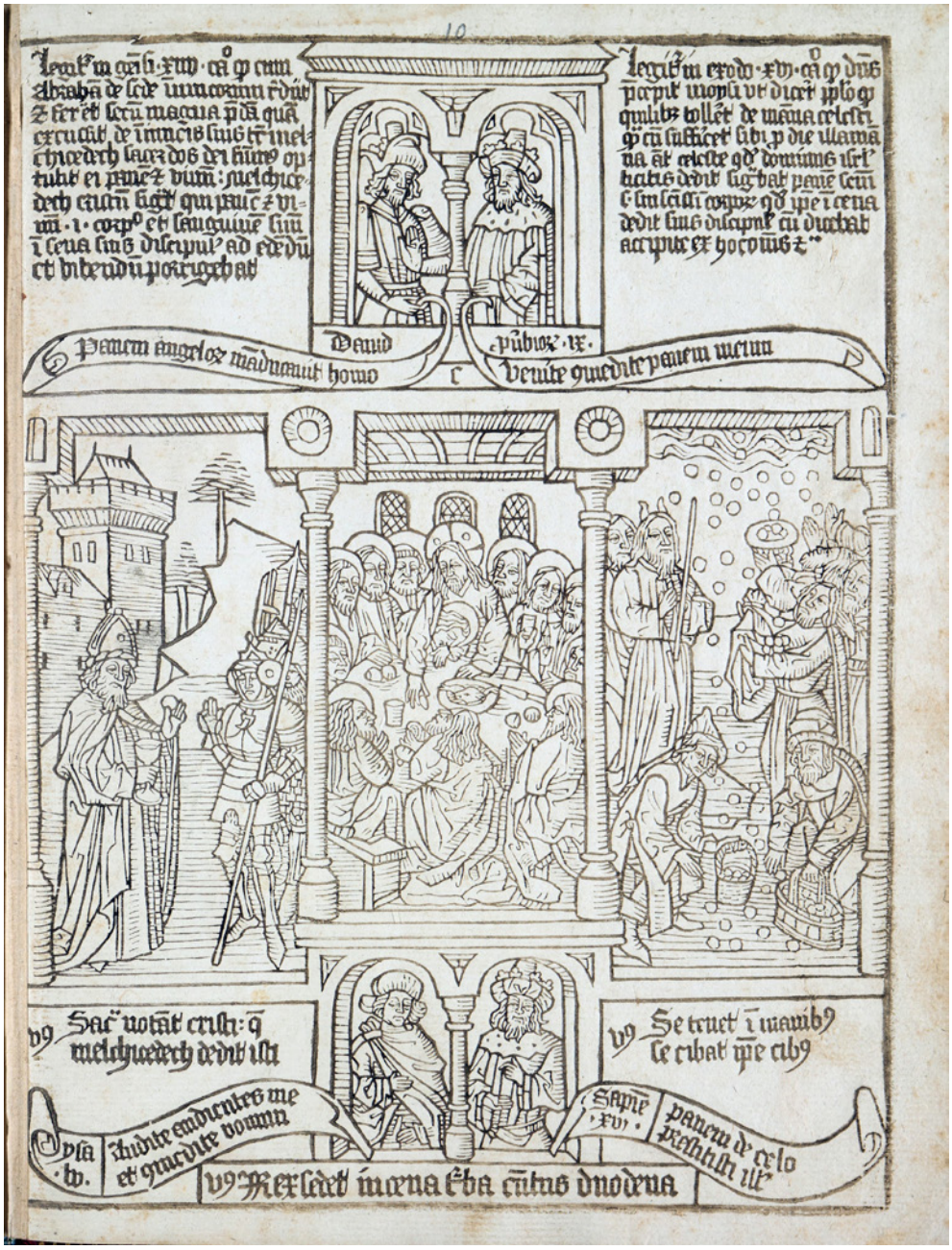

Fig. 8. Biblia Pauperum, Netherlands or Germany, around 1465-1470, fol. 18r, National Library of Scotland (photo: National Library of Scotland, CC BY 4.0)

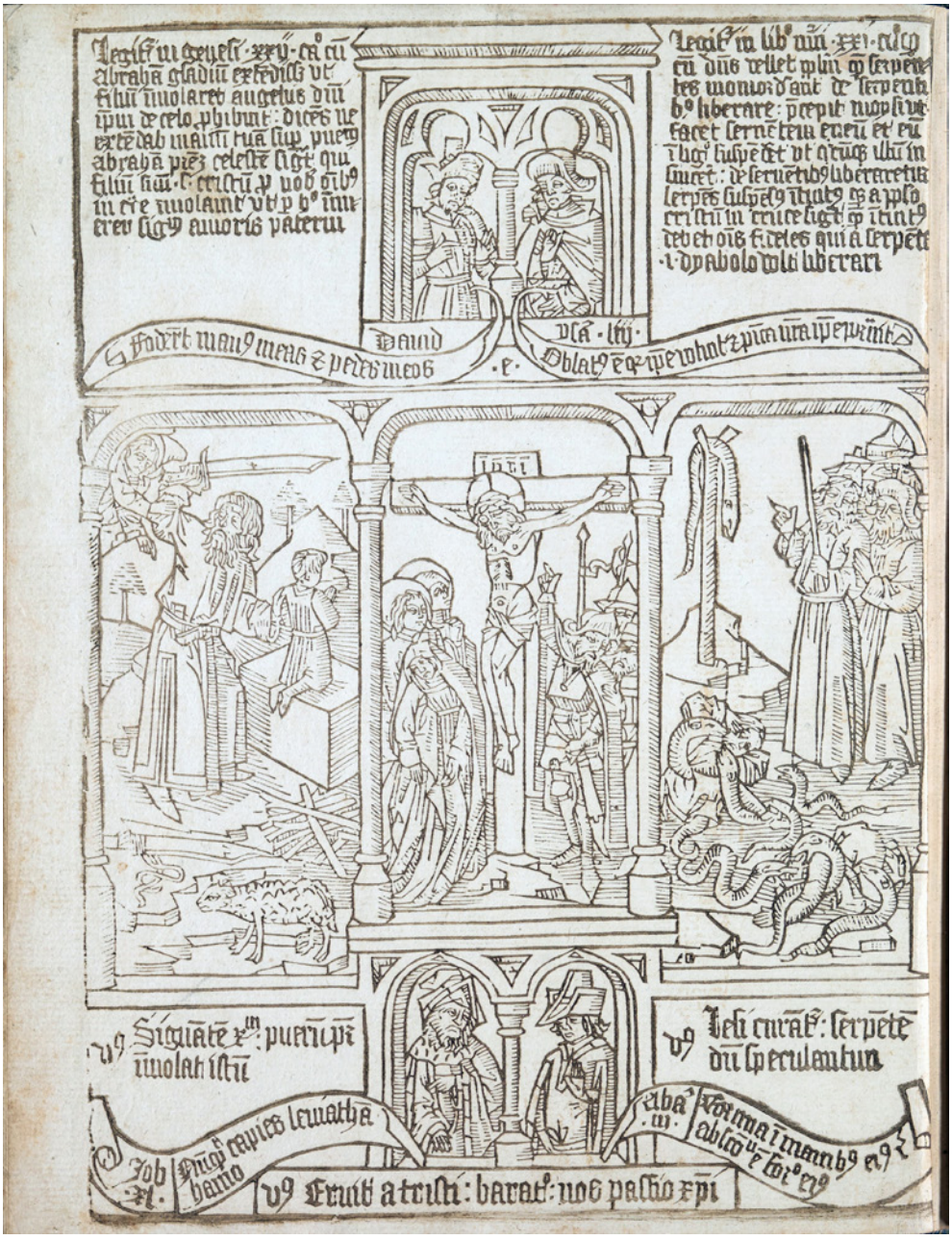

Fig. 9. Biblia Pauperum, Netherlands or Germany, around 1465-1470, fol. 25v, National Library of Scotland (photo: National Library of Scotland, CC BY 4.0)

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ISSN 2039-2362