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*Christ Child with Instruments of the Passion*

17<sup>th</sup> century

Peru

Oil and gold on copper

**DIMENSIONS**

Devotion to the *Arma Christi* or “Weapons of Christ” was popular across Medieval and early modern Europe. The *arma* were the objects used in Christ’s Passion; among them are the nails with which he was bound to the cross, the spear of Longinus, the dice with which Roman soldiers gambled, and the Crown of Thorns. Engagement with the *Arma Christi* via a devotional text or image would draw the viewer in to a “*memoria Passionis*” – a meditation on the suffering of Christ at the Passion.<sup>1</sup> The meaning of the *Arma Christi* shifted over time; in the Medieval period they were understood as Christ’s weapons in the fight against Satan and death, rather than exclusively as the objects causing his suffering.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Lisa H. Cooper and Andrea Denny-Brown, “Introduction: *Arma Christi*: The Material Culture of the Passion” in *The Arma Christi in Medieval and Early Modern Material Culture, With a Critical Edition of ‘O Vernicle’* eds. Cooper and Denny-Brown (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014), 4. On the *Arma Christi* more generally, see Gertrud Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art, Volume 2: The Passion of Jesus Christ*, trans. Janet Seligman (Greenwich, CT: New York Graphic Society Ltd., 1972), 184-97.

<sup>2</sup> Schiller, *Iconography*, 184.

This small work on copper draws from one of several engravings by Hieronymus Wierix (fig. 1).<sup>3</sup> Over his right shoulder, Christ Child carries the cross on which he would be crucified, which bears the *Titulus Crucis* (INRI) and the crown of thorns. Somewhat obscured by overpainting are the spear of Longinus, which was used by a Roman soldier to stab Christ after his agony on the Cross, and the sponge of vinegar tied to a pole, offered to him in lieu of water.<sup>4</sup> In his left hand, the Christ Child carries a basket bearing other instruments of the *Arma Christi*: the nails with which his hands were secured to the cross and the hammer which drove them in; the pincers used to remove the nails at the Deposition; the dice with which the Roman soldiers gambled for Christ's seamless purple robe; and Veronica's veil, with which she wiped his brow during one of his falls on the walk to Golgotha.



Fig. 1 Hieronymus Wierix, *Christ Child with Instruments of the Passion*, after 1619, engraving. British Museum, London.

In a departure from the engraving, Christ treads not on a rocky ground against the backdrop of a cityscape but over a bed of flowers against a dark background – a feature also found in other, European works after Wierix, such as a work at the Dulwich Picture Gallery (fig. 2) and another at the Städel Museum (fig. 3). It is possible, then, that an intermediary print exists

<sup>3</sup> At the bottom of the Wierix engraving is the inscription “In laboribus à iuuentute mea” which derives from Psalm 87:16: “I am poor, and in labors from my youth: and being exalted have been humbled and troubled.”

<sup>4</sup> The ladder, used in the Deposition, is also missing, and may have been overpainted.

that served as a more direct source for these works, especially given the variations in the contents of Christ's basket.



Fig. 2 Unidentified artist, *Christ Child with Instruments of the Passion*, first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, oil on copper. Dulwich Picture Gallery.





Fig. 3 Unidentified artist, *Christ Child with Instruments of the Passion*, c. 1610-30, oil on copper. Städel Museum, Frankfurt.

The sensitively depicted face of Christ, muted colors, and minimal application of gold suggest an artist working in seventeenth-century Lima. The fine touches of gold on the nimbus and at the edges of Christ's rose-colored mantle may have been added at a later date or sparingly applied at the time of the painting's creation. The intimate scale of this work and its subject matter suggest that this work was employed in private contemplation within a domestic setting.

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