



2017.070

Unidentified Artist

Peru

Christ Dragged Through the Brook of Cedron

Seventeenth century

Oil on canvas, 50 3/8 x 38 inches.

The subject of this painting is a conflation of several moments in the Passion of Christ as described in the New Testament texts of Saints Luke and Mark:

When Jesus had said these things, he went forth with his disciples over the brook Cedron, where there was a garden, into which he entered with his disciples. And Judas also, who betrayed him, knew the place; because Jesus had often resorted thither together with his disciples. Judas therefore having received a band of soldiers and servants from the chief priests and the Pharisees, cometh thither with lanterns and torches and weapons. John 18:1-3 (Douay-Rheims Bible)

In Mark 26:36 the garden is identified as Gethsemane where “cometh Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve: and with him a great multitude, with swords and staves, from the chief priests and the scribes and the ancients” (Mark 14:43). In the painting, Christ is lowered in chains into the torrent of Cedron, while a large crowd of Roman soldiers gather around the bridge. Two small

angels wipe tears from Christ's face. The city of Jerusalem rises in the near distance. There is a similar painting in the Convent of Santa Teresa in Ayacucho, Peru (fig. 1), which reflects a common print source, and a few other paintings of this rare subject have been located in Peru.ⁱⁱ



Fig. 1. Unidentified Peruvian artist, *Christ Dragged Through the Brook of Cedron*, 17th century, oil on canvas. Convent of Santa Teresa, Ayacucho, Peru. Photo courtesy of Almerindo Ojeda.



Fig. 2. Engraving by Jan Christoffel Jegher from designs by A. Sallaert, in Jodocus Andries, *Perpetua Crux. Sive Passio Jesu Christi a puncto Incarnationis ad extremum vitae; iconibus quadragenis....* Antwerp, 1649. Photo courtesy of Almerindo Ojeda.

The subject is pictured in abbreviated form in a number of devotional books (fig. 2). The concept of Christ, having fallen into the brook Cedron, being dragged through it to the other side by Roman soldiers, begins with the fourteenth-century writing of Ludolph of Saxony. His *Vita Christi* was first published in the 1470s. Soon thereafter, the subject appeared in prints and manuscript illuminations that reflect the devotional practice honoring the “Seven Falls” of

Christ, of which this is the first. The “Seven Falls” was later replaced by the Stations of the Cross.

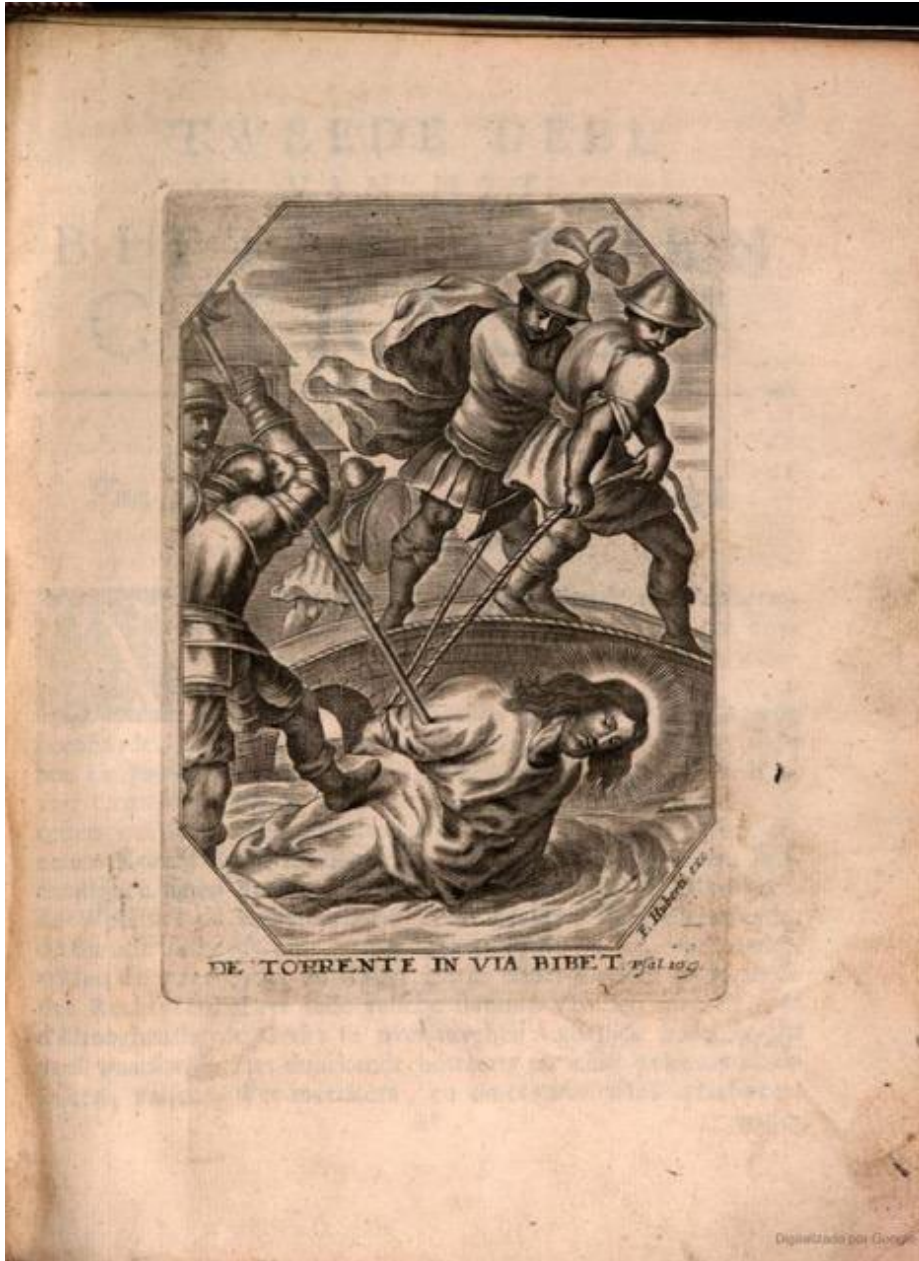


Fig. 3. Engraving by the workshop of Francis Huberti, “*De torrente in via bibet*” in Cornelio de Bie, *Truerspel van het bitter Lyden Christi oft Goddelyck Ransoen det sielen salicheyt* (Antwerp?: 1687), 144. Photo courtesy Almerindo Ojeda. The title of the engraving by Huberti and the inscription on the banderole in the Thoma painting are from Psalm 109 (Vulgate 110): “*De torrente in via bibet, propterea exaltabit caput*” (He shall drink of the brook in the way, therefore shall he lift up his head). The psalm is interpreted as an Old Testament

forecast of the New Testament texts of the evangelists Mark and John.

The Thoma painting is vividly composed, with many colorful figures in a dramatic landscape. The graphic source of the composition has not been identified, but the bird's eye view and many details of the costumes recall late sixteenth and early seventeenth-century engravings such those in Jerome Nadal's *Annotations and Meditations on the Gospels*. The Thoma painting may have been the first in a series representing the Falls of Christ.

Suzanne Stratton-Pruitt

ⁱ This title is based on the research of James H. Marrow, *Passion Iconography in Northern European Art of the Late Middle Ages and Early Renaissance: A Study* (Kortrijk, Belgium: Van Ghemmet Pub. Co., 1979), 105.

ⁱⁱ In the archives of the Peruvian art historian Francisco Stastny are several photographs of paintings of this subject that he had located in his research. I am grateful to Vera and Cathy Stastny for allowing me to see the archive, and to Francisco Yábar for photographing the images. The several paintings located by Stastny demonstrate that the subject was not as rare in Peru as one might think.