The medieval narrative contains substantial prayers, not least by Fierrabras' opponent, the paladin Olivier (who becomes Fierrabras' friend after a fierce fight which forces the Muslim knight Fierrabras to convert to Christianity) summarizing Christian faith by reference for instance, to the passion of Christ, his resurrection, and the Holy Ghost. These prayers were included in the 1809 version (see for instance Büsching/Hagen: 163–64), but not reflected in the opera, where the fight between Olivier and Fierrabras and the whole conversion story has been toned almost completely down (and Olivier replaced by Roland).

Still, a slight residue of the religious atmosphere of the medieval narrative is found in a vaguely biblical hymn, sung by the paladins while imprisoned by the Moor Boland (Baland in the German *Fierrabras* narrative) in act 2, scene 12. Here the mood of the paladins changes radically, as Boland's daughter joins them to help them flee. They sing a hymn-like chorus, mainly *a cappella* but with orchestral accompaniment to both last lines of its two stanzas (each in four lines). In the chorus, the paladins pray to God for help to achieve freedom and for consolation in horror. The mentioned concluding lines of each stanza, "O großer, ew'ger Gott!" (O great, eternal God) and "Erhell' der Hoffnung Licht!" (Illuminate by the light of hope; Kupelwieser: 327) are repeated with an increasing orchestral emphasis, and the brief musical, strophic setting lends the prayer a character of (newfound) hope and courage. Otherwise, in the opera, the religious (and political) conflicts of the original narrative have been individualized and privatized.

**Works:** ■ Mozart, W.A./L. Da Ponte, *Don Giovanni (drama giocoso in 2 acts)* (KV 527; Prague 1787). ■ Schubert, F./J. Kupelwieser, *Fierrabras (Heroic-Romantic Opera in 3 acts)* (Vienna 1823).

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See also  → Hagiography; → Holiness; → Legenda Aurea; → Legend of the True Cross; → Martyr, → Martyrdom; → Midrash and Aggadah; → Myth; → Narrative

## Legend of the True Cross

The Legend of the True Cross crediting Empress Helena with the discovery of the cross upon which Jesus was crucified originated at the end of the 4th century CE. The True Cross was already venerated in Jerusalem, at Constantine's Anastasis Rotunda, in the mid-4th century, and relics of it had been disseminated across Europe by pilgrims; however, how Helena found the True Cross emerged a little later, as testified by a collection of brief patristic testimonies from the turn of the 5th century CE. In 390, John Chrysostom referred to the relic of the cross (*Hom. Jo.* 85), but he did not associate it with Helena. However, Bishop Ambrose's *De obitu Theodosii*, written just a few years later in 395 CE for the deceased Emperor Theodosius (*PG* 59:461) as an *exemplum* for pious emperors, is the first surviving text mentioning how Helena went to Jerusalem on the request of her son, Constantine. According to Ambrose, with the aid of the Holy Spirit, Helena recovered Jesus' cross on Golgotha. Paulinus of Nola in 402 (*Epist.*; *PL* 61:325–30) and Rufinus in 403 CE (*Hist. eccl.*; *PL* 21:475–78) both mention Helena's input in the recovery of the relic, and add that the Jews and the local bishop, Macarius, helped in the empress' quest. In these and in later accounts, the True Cross was distinguished from the other two crosses, those of the thieves that were excavated along with the True Cross, by a test. The True Cross miraculously revived a dead woman or man (the sources vary about the gender).

These brief patristic references were further developed into an anonymous variant of the later 5th century CE, the legend of Judas Cyriacus, which relates how the Jew, Judas (not to be confused with Judas the traitor, however the choice for the name might have been deliberately pejorative) was tortured by Helena into revealing the location of the cross. After seven days of starvation in a dried out well, he relents and tells the secret that he had heard from his forefathers: the cross of the Messiah lies hidden in the place of Golgotha. This version of the legend, probably of Syrian origin, was translated into Latin in early times and found its way into Carolingian iconography. An illuminated initial, what may be the earliest image of the legend of the True Cross, shows only Judas excavating the three crosses from the ground. In the image, the three crosses, surrounded by nails, are set within the initial "O" and Judas is adjacent in the marginal, shovel in hand ("*Inventio Crucis*," *Gellone Sacramentary*, ca. 750–90 CE. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale MS lat. 12048, fol. 76v; see fig. 2).

A quite developed illuminated cycle can be found in the early 9th century CE, in the *Wessobrun-*

Fig. 2   "Judas and the three crosses" (8th cent.)

*ner Gebetbuch* (804 CE, Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek MS Gm. 22053). The first twenty-one folios record the legend, with most of the pages having illustrations recounting the full significance of the cross to Constantine and his mother – from Constantine's dream, his victory under its sign, through Helena's pilgrimage, interaction with Judas, the discovery and test of the cross. A lost Byzantine model has been assumed for this cycle. An Italian compendium of canon law dated to the late 8th century (Vercelli, Biblioteca Capitolare MS 165, fol. 2r) illustrates Judas excavating the cross and presenting it to an enthroned Helena, and Helena and Constantine. The Constantinopolitan illuminated *Homilies* of Gregory of Nazianzus features a single panel with two scenes – Helena enthroned instructing or interrogating the Jews (including Judas), and the subsequent excavation of the True Cross (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale Cod. grec. 510, fol. 440r). This is at the bottom of a page dedicated to showing the dream of Constantine and Constantine's victory under the sign of the cross.

Thus, by the 8th and 9th centuries CE, in both the Latin West and the Greek East, the legend's visual iconography took shape with depictions of the empress on her throne ordering or interrogating Judas or a group of Jews, the actual discovery of the cross – either Christ's cross alone or all three crosses – as the Jews or Judas digs in the ground (sometimes with Helena in attendance, sometimes with a formal presentation following the cross' discovery), and the miraculous revivification by the cross, or the test of the cross. Many of these images

could be found situated within the narrative of the first Christian emperor and his victory under the sign of the cross.

The story's illustration also grew alongside the cult of the True Cross, which solidified the importance of the relic across Christendom with the spread of splinter and contact relics and related imagery. Situated within the context of the cult, from the 7th century onward, the legend of the finding of the cross was supplemented by the exaltation of the cross, which involved the Byzantine emperor Heraclius' retrieval of the cross from the Muslims who had taken Jerusalem. Images related to the restoration of the True Cross to Jerusalem, such as Heraclius processing the True Cross into the city, added another historical dimension to the tale (e.g., "Heraclius restores the True Cross to Jerusalem," *Pericopes of St. Erentrud*, Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek MS Clm. 15903, fol. 86v).

Moreover, the importance of the True Cross was augmented in imperial propaganda, which associated the Byzantine imperial rule with the True Cross, especially through images of Helena and Constantine with the cross. The discovery by the first Christian emperor and his mother, as a joint endeavor, was visually reinforced in several statue groups found in Constantinopolitan *fora* described in historical sources (Teteriatnikov: 174–76), which record representations of crosses flanked by the pair, an iconography that was repeated in mosaics, paintings, icons, and minor arts (e.g., Helena and Constantine flank the cross, Byzantine ivory, 10th cent., Staatliche Museen, Berlin). By the 9th century CE, Constantine and Helena are found invariably garbed in contemporary Byzantine imperial vestments as they jointly hold or flank the cross, and Constantine is consistently given a beard, unlike his late antique portraits. This icon, however, seemed to serve well enough to encapsulate the legend, for developed cycles in churches from the Orthodox East do not feature, whereas the icon of the imperial figures with the cross is practically ubiquitous in middle, late, and post-Byzantine church monumental decoration.

Emblematic images of the narrative of the finding of the True Cross by Helena can be found, unsurprisingly, on cross reliquaries from the Latin Christian tradition. Greek cross reliquaries – *staurothekes* and personal *enkolpia* – are more likely to be decorated with the crucifixion, icons of saints, archangels, Constantine and Helena, or any combination of these figures. For example, in a late 10th-century ivory *staurotheke*, in the Church of St. Francis, Cortona since 1245, the cross fragment is placed behind a screen made into the shape of the cross, with medallions of Christ and archangels along the top, the cross itself flanked by four figures, one in each quadrant (Mary, John the Baptist, St. Stephen, John the Evangelist), and the bottom having medallions with Helena, Constantine, and Longinus.

A telling example survives in the composite object that is the golden and jeweled *Stavelot Tryptich* (ca. 1156–58, Pierpont Morgan Library and Museum, New York). The center panel holds the original, enamel *enkolpion* of Greek origin, the cross fragment embedded in it conforming to the shape of a tiny cross, which is flanked by Constantine and Helena below the cross-arms and angels above the arms; the wings of the Greek triptych show full-length figures of the four Gospel writers (there is also a smaller Greek triptych set above the first, with the scene of the crucifixion). The larger triptych within which these are set, was crafted in the Latin West. It has wings decorated with six enamel medallions of the legend: Constantine's dream, Constantine's victory, Constantine's baptism, Helena interrogating the Jews about the location of the cross, the excavation of the cross, and the testing of the cross.

Monumental narrative cycles relating the Legend of the True Cross apparently began in northern Italy, likely in relation to the cultural-religious interest in the suffering of Christ on the cross and the devotional aspiration of experiencing the Christ's suffering as co-passion. As such, it became especially relevant to St. Francis' stigmata and the subsequent Franciscan devotion to the True Cross. The first monumental cycle depicting the legend of the True Cross can be found painted on the northern wall of the very small, 12th-century Church of San Severo church in Bardolino, near Verona, which includes the scenes of the dream of Constantine, the battle of the Milvian Bridge, the empress Helena arriving in Jerusalem, Helena interrogating a group of Jews, Helena ordering them to bring Judah, Helena interrogating Judah, Helena ordering Judah extracted from the well of torture, finding the three crosses, the test of the True Cross, and Helena installing the True Cross (Christe: *passim*). The scenes follow precedents in manuscript illumination, especially the formula of the enthroned empress Helena interrogating the Jews, which could also be found in Italian panel painting beginning around this time. The oldest surviving altar antependium in Italy is dated by its creator, the Master of Tressa to November 1214 (Pinacoteca Nazionale, Siena) and has two scenes of Helena seated on her throne, one where she is interrogating the Jews, the other showing the test of the True Cross.

In the course of the 12th–13th century, a third branch of the legend developed the legend of the wood of the cross in the Latin West, which accounts the adventures of the cross-wood during the old covenant. Jacobus of Voragine brought all of the historical branches of the legend together in his *Legenda Aurea* (ca. 1260), which is where the Legend of the Cross found a literary standard to fit the liturgical calendar: 3 May for the *Inventio sanctae crucis* (Helena) and 14 September for the *Esaltazione sanctae crucis* (Heraclius). The *Legenda aurea* also became the source for the cyclic iconography of the Legend of the Cross, especially popular in Franciscan churches.

The popularity of the Legend and the developments in Trecento painting permitted expansions and innovations in the imagery related to the scenes. Agnolo Gaddi's fresco cycle for the Franciscan Church of Santa Croce, Florence (1388–93) represents the first monumental cycle of the True Cross based on the *Legend aurea* account. Gaddi's work consists of eight large panels visually recounting the OT history of the cross-wood and post-crucifixion fate of True Cross. The scenes included in each of the eight panels are: 1) the death of Adam with Seth receiving the branch from the archangel, Michael, and plants the tree; 2) Queen Sheba adoring the wood that has been used to build the Kendron bridge and King Solomon burying the wood; 3) the retrieval of the wood from the Probatic pool and the making of the cross; 4) the discovery by Helena and the testing of the True Cross; 5) Helena presenting the cross to the people of Jerusalem; 6) the flight of Chosroes as he removes the cross from Jerusalem; 7) Chosroes worshipped by his subjects, the dream of Heraclius, and Heraclius defeats son of Chosroes; 8) the beheading of Chosroes, the angle appearing to Heraclius, and the entry of Heraclius into Jerusalem. Gaddi's imagery and choice of scenes became the model for numerous other cycles in the 14th and the 15th centuries in northern Italy and across the Alps, as well.

Later images inspired by the Legend of the True Cross in the West often focused on Helena alone as a visionary and saint. Images of her enthroned were replaced with introspective representations. She is shown having a dream of the cross (e.g., Paolo Veronese, *Vision of Saint Helena*, ca. 1580, Pinacoteca, Vatican). Devotional images and iconic representations of Helena picture her standing with or holding the cross as her identifying attribute (e.g., sculpture of St. Helena, Andrea Bolgi, 1635 in St Peter's Basilica, Vatican City).

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## Legenda Aurea

### I. Literature

The *Legenda Aurea* (*Golden Legend*) was composed by Jacobus de Voragine, a Dominican monk and later archbishop of Genoa, before 1270. Originally titled *Legenda sanctorum* (*Legenda* meaning a reading or lesson, not a legend), the work was renamed *Legenda aurea* on account of its growing popularity. A testament to its fame is the survival of more than 500 manuscripts and 150 translations and printed editions from the first century after Jacobus composed it. During the early modern and Reformation periods, however, the work quickly fell from favor and was labeled as superstition and lies.

The structure of the *Legenda Aurea* follows the liturgical calendar. Its prologue discusses how the four periods of the liturgical year paralleled the four periods of the spiritual history of the world, as presented in the OT and NT: erring from Adam to Moses (Septuagesima to Easter), renewal from Moses to Jesus (Advent to Christmas), reconciliation during Jesus' life (Easter to Pentecost), and pilgrimage to the present (Pentecost to Advent). Furthermore, Christmas to Epiphany is also reconciliation and Epiphany to Septuagesima is pilgrimage. The work then presents the saints' narratives and the events of Jesus' life, beginning with advent, and ends with a discussion of the purpose and method of consecrating a church.

While the number of entries varies between manuscripts, Johann Georg T. Grasse accepts 182 chapters as authentic. Along with the prologue and conclusion, the work contains 156 chs. on the saints and martyrs, seven feast days from Jesus' life, four from Mary's life, two in honor of the cross, and nine chapters that explore significant times in the Church calendar.

In his saints' lives, Jacobus was concerned more with the stories' religious significance than their historical accuracy. He mentions 130 sources ranging from the 2nd century CE to contemporary times, but often remarks on the dubious nature of some of them. The entries typically begin with a gloss of the saint's name, usually spurious. Next, his source either precedes or follows the narrative of the saint's life, focusing on miracles and deeds before and after the saint's death. The chapters on the lives of Jesus and Mary draw on biblical and legendary sources. Jacobus focuses on the events' significance, citing biblical passages and church fathers to explain and interpret them. He also includes anecdotes that symbolically portray the importance of a particular feast.

Because Jacobus was a member of the Order of Preachers, some critics assume that the purpose of the *Legenda Aurea* was to provide a clerical audience with materials for developing their sermons. However, in his foreword William Caxton noted that he printed the work for the less educated people, and Jacobus' simple and direct approach supports Caxton's purpose.

The *Legenda Aurea* influenced other hagiographical works of the Middle Ages, particularly those written in England after Caxton's edition of the *Golden Legend* was printed, but also other works outside the hagiographical tradition. The stories were used to develop scenes in biblical plays. The *Legenda Aurea* also influenced religious allegories in the Middle Ages. Dante used Jacobus' Life of St. Sylvester in both the *Divine Comedy* and *De Monarchia*, and Langland mentioned the Legend as the *Legendae Sanctorum* in the vision poem of *Piers Plowman* (late 14th cent.). Furthermore, Chaucer's "Merchant's Tale," which recounts the life of St. Cecilia, is derived from the *Golden Legend* or a related work. Likewise, according to some scholars, the episode of the two old men and the cane in part 2, ch. 45 of Cervantes' *Don Quixote* (pt. 1, 1605; pt. 2, 1615) finds its source in an anecdote from the life of St. Nicholas as told in the *Legenda Aurea*.

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### II. Visual Arts

Jacobus de Voragine's *Legenda aurea* is frequently cited as a major source for the iconography of works of art during the late Middle Ages and Renaissance. Certainly, the *Legenda aurea* was widely available at the time, rivalling the Bible in popularity and translated into all the major European languages shortly after its composition around 1260.