

# St. Veronica: Evolution of a Sacred Legend

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When I was a child, the Stations of the Cross were a big part of my experiences of Holy Week at my home parish. I am a very visual person, so I remember well the stations that were on display. They were carved from a light-colored wood and rendered in a very realistic and striking style.

Of these stations, one in particular always stood out to me, the sixth station: Veronica Wipes Jesus's Face. Even as a child, I was deeply moved by Veronica's compassion for the Lord. Her simple yet profound act of mercy in his greatest moment of need had an unforgettable quality to it. Little did I know that the Veronica legend was so convoluted from a literary point of view and that it extended so profoundly into art, theology, and spiritual devotion.<sup>1</sup>

## Earliest references

First things first:<sup>2</sup> Veronica's real name is Bernice or Beronikē in Greek, meaning "bearer of victory." In addition to the Greek interpretation of the name, there is ancient speculation such as that of Gerald of Wales or Giraldus Cambrensis (ca. 1146–1223), an archdeacon of Brecon (1175–1203) and medieval historian, in his *Speculum ecclesiae* ("Mirror of the church"; written ca. 1219), that claims that the name Veronica actually derives from the Latin *vera* (true) *icon* (image).<sup>3</sup> Literally, in this way of thinking, the woman was named for the object she venerated, i.e., the image of Christ's face. However, it is highly unlikely that this is true. Alvin Earle Ford, who is extremely conversant with the various incarnations of the Veronica legends, states that such an explanation "likely represents nothing more than an example of post-factum folk-etymologizing." Ford prefers to believe that any one of the various Greek versions of her name could have been Latinized into Veronica without any reference to her ownership of the sacred image.<sup>4</sup>

However one interprets her name, her first literary appearance is quite late, in a gospel-like text called the *Acts of Pilate* (a.k.a. the *Gospel of Nicodemus*)<sup>5</sup> that recounts only the trial, death, and resurrection of Jesus. This text is variously dated from the mid-fourth to the fifth/sixth century,<sup>6</sup> although there is evidence that multiple (and different) documents circulated under this title from at least the second century.<sup>7</sup>

It is almost anticlimactic to note that our heroine, Beronikē, has only a cameo appearance in the *Acts of Pilate*. Her arrival on stage takes place during the trial of Jesus before Pilate. It will be

helpful to provide here a sense of the larger context of the trial so we can better appreciate her role.

When the enemies of Jesus—the chief priests, scribes, and various members of the council—appear before Pilate to prosecute their case, their charges are numerous. They accuse him saying, "We know that this one is the son of the carpenter Joseph and was born from Mary; yet he calls himself a son of God and a king. Moreover, he profanes the Sabbath and wants to destroy our ancestral law" (*Acts of Pilate* 1.1). Thus, we can see right away that their prosecution of Jesus will fall into three categories: (1) his parentage and (as the reader shall see) events surrounding his birth, (2) his claims to divine sonship and earthly kingship, and (3) the reasons why they feel Jesus has profaned the Sabbath and the threat he poses to the law.

In reply to their indictments, Pilate ignores the first two aspects and asks the accusers about Jesus's desire to "destroy" their ancestral law. Their reply focuses on Jesus's efforts as miracle worker, explaining to Pilate, "We have a law that no one may be healed on the Sabbath. But this one has performed evil deeds by healing the lame and crippled, the withered and the blind, the paralyzed, mute, and demon possessed on the Sabbath" (1.1). It is this focus on the healings of Jesus that will eventually bring our heroine, Beronikē, to the forefront of the trial.

First, the narrative unfolds with Jesus's enemies' attempts to besmirch his character with charges that (1) he was born of fornication, (2) his birth led to the destruction of the infants in Bethlehem, and (3) his parents, Joseph and Mary, fled to Egypt. This is followed by a defense of Jesus's family by twelve pious Jews (2.3–6). Next, the charges related to Jesus's claims of divine sonship and kingship are investigated by Pilate (3.1–4.5).

Finally, the issue of Jesus's activities as a miracle worker comes to the forefront, albeit in a way that seems to honor Jesus rather than discredit him. One by one, people from the crowd step forward and testify to the miraculous actions of Jesus. First to testify is the paralytic who, upon being healed, took up his cot and walked (*Acts of Pilate* 6.1).<sup>8</sup> Yet, the enemies of Jesus attempt to discredit the value of this healing by noting that it was affected on the Sabbath. Next, in rapid succession come several others, such as the blind man who cried out to Jesus, "Have mercy on me, Son of David." Ostensibly, he is the "son of Timaeus" found in Mark 10:46–52 (see *Acts of Pilate* 6.2). Testimony is then offered by the man with a crooked back<sup>9</sup> and the leper<sup>10</sup> (both in *Acts of Pilate* 6.2).

Finally, after these four men testify, Beronikē steps forward and cries out in Jesus's defense, "I had a flow of blood, and I touched the hem of his garment, and the flow of blood I had for twelve years was stopped" (*Acts of Pilate* 7). She is immediately discredited by Jesus's enemies who state that Jewish law does not allow a woman to give witness in court.

So, here we see that the legend of Beronikē begins with a naming, an identification of the woman with the hemorrhage known from Mark 5. We do not have the familiar wiping of Jesus's face.

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However, the components of that familiar story are present, at least in a seminal way (i.e., the woman and Jesus, blood, and a special focus on an article of clothing that becomes the conduit between the two).

### A legend begins to develop

The next phase of the story involves a later appendix to the *Acts of Pilate*, probably dating from the seventh or eighth century, called the *Cura sanitatis Tiberii* (The Cure of Tiberius).<sup>11</sup> This is the oldest form of a developed Veronica legend, although it is largely unrecognizable to modern Christians.

Before proceeding, it should be stated clearly that this Latin episode has many variants, so a detailed summary of the course of the legend without explicit indication of at least some of the variations present within the manuscript traditions would be both misleading and inaccurate. Here, in light of space limitations, I will outline the general plot of the story, giving a sense of its many variations without burdening the reader with too much detail.<sup>12</sup>

We can say that the basic plot of the *Cura sanitatis Tiberii* begins with the fact that an emperor (the identity of whom varies) or a close relative of an emperor is gravely ill. In the manuscript traditions that preserve an independent version of this legend, the sick person is the Emperor Tiberius, so we will proceed as if that is the identity of the sick man. The nature of the sickness varies wildly from manuscript to manuscript. Simply put, it is a serious illness, but not immediately life threatening, which will afford time for the journeys so essential to the plot's unfolding.

Through hearsay or rumor, Tiberius learns of a physician named Jesus Christ who lives in the vicinity of Jerusalem. Some manuscripts suggest that it was Pilate himself (or even the Apostle Peter) who made this information known to the emperor. Other manuscripts offer additional explanations.<sup>13</sup> In many of the manuscripts, the emperor believes that Jesus is still alive. Therefore, he charges the envoy—in the majority of manuscripts a nobleman and priest named Volusianus—to find this Jesus and bring him to Rome.<sup>14</sup>

Upon his appearance in Jerusalem, Volusianus learns from Pontius Pilate that he has arrived too late: Jesus has been crucified. However, according to witnesses, he has risen from the dead. With regard to these claims, Volusianus proceeds to hear testimony—here again, the manuscript traditions vary considerably as to the number of those consulted and the identities of those interviewed. Examples include such notables as Pilate himself, Joseph of Arimathea, and men who witnessed the ascension. Typically, Pilate is punished for his involvement in the death of Jesus.<sup>15</sup>

The manuscripts are largely in agreement over what happens next. Volusianus encounters a lad named Marcius, who tells him about a woman named Veronica whom Jesus healed of a hemorrhage some three years prior. (Note again the identification of Veronica as the woman with the hemorrhage.) Marcius explains that Veronica has in her possession a portrait of Jesus that she herself had painted while Jesus was still alive, because of her esteem for him. We should note here that, at this point in the devel-

opment of the legend, the portrait is not yet rendered on cloth. In addition, there is no connection between this image and Jesus's passion, as we modern Christians take for granted when we think of the story of St. Veronica.

Volusianus summons Veronica and demands to see the portrait. At first, Veronica denies that she possesses such an object, but, eventually, she admits that she has it. A particularly interesting facet of the manuscript traditions here is the variety of ways that Volusianus is presented as dealing with Veronica, ranging from his use of gentle persuasion, to his issuing rather heavy-handed threats, to, in one tradition, his decision to employ torture until Veronica gives up the portrait.

Volusianus brings Veronica and her portrait with him to Rome. In some manuscript traditions, Pilate comes along too, while in others he drops out of the narrative, sometimes as part of his punishment for his crimes. Once in Rome, Veronica is introduced to Tiberius. The emperor asks to see the portrait, and Veronica consents. Upon seeing the image of Christ, Tiberius falls to the ground, worships the image, and is healed. In some variants, a profession of faith in Jesus Christ follows. In others, Veronica is rewarded lavishly. The final details of the story, decidedly less important (such as the fate of the emperor), vary greatly from manuscript to manuscript.

Another steppingstone of sorts in the history of the Veronica legend is an early eighth-century text called the *Vindicta Salvatoris* (The Vengeance of the Savior).<sup>16</sup> This text uses the *Cura sanitatis Tiberii* as a primary source. The author of the *Vindicta Salvatoris* retells much of the story of Volusianus and Veronica that we know from the *Cura sanitatis Tiberii*, but makes some important changes. In this variant, Volusianus confronts Veronica and asks for the portrait of Jesus (*vultum domini*, literally “the countenance of the Lord” in Latin). Veronica refuses and is tortured until she hands it over. Volusianus boards a ship and returns to Rome. Veronica is unbowed. She abandons all her possessions and family and boards Volusianus's ship. Volusianus confronts her, asking, “Woman, whom are you seeking?” Veronica's response is haunting. She declares, “In truth, I am looking for (the image of) my Lord that the Lord gave to me, not for my merits but out of his mercy, and which you have taken away from me against the law—just as the Jews had taken Christ, whom neither you nor your people have seen, from the world. Even though I have deserved ill, hand back to me my Lord! And if you do not hand him back to me, I will not release him until I see where they have laid him down. And I will worship him as long as I live because my redeemer himself lives, and on the last day I shall see my God, my savior.” What is striking here is Veronica's identification of the portrait with the Lord. As with an actual icon, Christ is mystically present for Veronica in the portrait. She vows to follow the Lord in the icon wherever he may be taken, stopping only when she sees where the portrait will be housed.

What happens next is even more intriguing. As Veronica's sons and daughters weep over her departure, she states, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me but for yourselves, and weep for your daughters. For have you never heard God saying, ‘Every-

one who has left everything for the name of Christ will receive a hundredfold and will possess eternal life?” Here, the author has placed a combination of two sayings, attributed by the gospels to Jesus, on Veronica’s lips. The first, pertaining to the “daughters of Jerusalem,” comes from Luke 23:28. The second, dealing with leaving everything for Christ and a subsequent hundredfold reward, is found in Mark 10:29–30. For our purposes, I want to focus on the first of these.

Veronica’s use of Luke 23:28 is particularly striking in that it represents the first time Veronica is associated with the passion of the Lord. Even more importantly, by using this particular saying of Jesus, the figure of Veronica is linked essentially with those gospel traditions associated with Jesus’s carrying of his cross. Simply stated, this literary “moment” is the first time the character of Veronica is connected with the exact “place” she will eventually come to occupy in sacred tradition.

Further pious detail is added to the Veronica legend by a German poem entitled *Dit is Veronica*, written circa 1160.<sup>17</sup> This poem tells another version of how the image of Jesus’s face came to be in Veronica’s possession. In this poem, Veronica commissions Luke to paint a portrait of Jesus. However, Luke’s attempt does not satisfy Veronica because, when she compares it to Jesus, she finds that it does not resemble him. Apologetic, Luke tries again, to no avail. Luke tries yet a third time, but experiences no success. Finally, Jesus explains that only in heaven is his true likeness known. Oddly, Jesus asks Veronica to invite him to dinner. Once seated at the table, Jesus washes his face and dries it with a towel. Miraculously, Jesus’s features are impressed into the cloth! It should be noted that, by this point in the legend’s development, the image is described explicitly as appearing on a piece of cloth. There might be a temptation to assume that this marks the first explicit indication that the image was rendered on cloth. That is difficult to say with certainty. Identifying the first literary appearance of Jesus’s image on a cloth is a difficult thing indeed.

As an illustration of the sheer complexity of this question, I would direct the reader to the work of Mary Swan.<sup>18</sup> In her very interesting essay, Swan discusses two Old English manuscripts found in Cambridge: (1) *University Library* li. 2. 11 (CUL) and (2) *Corpus Christi College* 196 (Corpus), both copies of the *Vindicta Salvatoris* and both dating from the third quarter of the eleventh century.<sup>19</sup> Swan notes that both manuscripts share an intriguing variation of the Veronica legend: they understand the image of Jesus to be imprinted on a piece of Jesus’s own garment and not merely on her veil or a random piece of cloth! Swan states that there

are strong indicators that the Veronica legend in eleventh-century England had a distinct twist: the CUL and Corpus texts show a connection being made between the image of Christ which Veronica possesses and a piece of his garment. . . . The tantalising possibility which these examples reveal is that by the eleventh century, there exists a distinctive, early, Old English tradition in which Veronica is already associated

with an image of Christ’s face which is not painted, but which is on a piece of cloth from a garment—a configuration very close to the story of her wiping his face with her veil, whose introduction scholars have dated to as late as the fourteenth century.<sup>20</sup>

To Swan’s comments, I would add that, in light of the fact that Veronica is consistently associated with the hemorrhaging woman

of Mark 5 and the connections associated with Jesus’s garment in that story, it is poignant that Jesus is depicted as, once again, giving himself to Veronica through his garment. The analogy of the garment to the flesh, with all of the significance that

this implies for Christian eucharistic theology, is ripe for theological reflection.

### Developments in the Middle Ages

Yet another variant of exactly how Veronica came into possession of an image of Jesus is provided in the famous medieval work written by the Dominican Jacobus de Voragine (a.k.a. Giacomo de Varrazze, ca. 1229–1298). Jacobus wrote a work called the *Legenda Sanctorum* (Legend of the Saints) which is better known as the *Legenda Aurea* (Golden Legend). This text, dating from around 1260, was arguably one of the most popular religious works of the medieval period. The *Golden Legend* is a collection of pious hagiography, written as a helpful aide for priests and preachers with the intention of providing a ready source of edifying materials on a large selection of saints so as to enrich sermons and catechesis.<sup>21</sup>

In the section entitled, “The Passion of Our Lord,” Jacobus de Voragine has Veronica explain to Volusianus exactly how she obtained Jesus’s image. She states, “When the Teacher was going about preaching and I, to my regret, could not be with him, I wanted to have his picture painted so that when I was deprived of his presence, I could at least have the solace of his image. So one day I was carrying a piece of linen to the painter when I met Jesus, and he asked me where I was going. I told him what my errand was. He asked for the cloth I had in my hand, pressed it to his venerable face, and left his image on it. If your master looks devoutly upon this image, he will at once be rewarded by being cured.”

This variant, involving a cloth image of Jesus, is interesting indeed. Personally, I am led to ask about where (or if) Jacobus found this story in his source materials. In attempting to answer this question, I learned that we do know that, in presenting his story of Veronica, Jacobus relied on an earlier text called *Mors Pilati* (“The Death of Pilate”), which in turn represents only the final portion of a larger Latin life of Pilate called the *Historia Apocrypha*, written in the eleventh or twelfth century.<sup>22</sup> This *Mors Pilati* (i.e., the final section of the *Historia Apocrypha*) features a story virtually identical to that which we encounter in “The Passion of Our Lord” by Jacobus de Voragine.<sup>23</sup> While we must admit that this element of the Veronica story (i.e., the cloth) did not originate with Jacobus, we can state without hesitation that he played

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a key role in promulgating the idea of Jesus's image being located on a cloth.<sup>24</sup>

As a final point on the *Legenda Aurea*, we can assert that, in this telling by Jacobus de Voragine, there is no connection between Veronica's image and Jesus's passion.<sup>25</sup> Rather, it is clear that Jesus gives Veronica this image when he was engaged in his earthly ministry.

To the best of my knowledge, it seems that the initial expression of the idea that Veronica received her famous image of Christ during the midst of Jesus's passion (at least in a literary source) was made in a French work written circa 1230. The title of this work is the *Estoire del Saint Graal* (The History of the Holy Grail). It is one volume of a larger five-volume work called the *Lancelot-Grail* or *Vulgate Cycle*. The *Estoire del Saint Graal* is attributed to Robert de Boron, who is said to have authored an early Grail legend, *Joseph d'Arimathie* (ca. 1200), but de Boron's authorship of the *Estoire del Saint Graal* is decidedly uncertain.

In the *Estoire del Saint Graal*, the familiar story of Veronica, Volusianus, and Tiberius is changed. In this version, it is the Emperor Titus who seeks healing for his son, Vespasian.<sup>26</sup> In our story, Vespasian is suffering from leprosy, and Titus is desperate to help him. Hearing about the emperor's son, a knight from Capernaum comes forward who relates how a prophet in Judea healed him of leprosy when he was only a child. The knight relates how this "prophet" was killed by the Jews, but tells Vespasian that he believes that if they could only get ahold of something this prophet touched, that object could effect a healing.

Encouraged by this hope, Titus asks the knight to go and find such an object. The knight obliges and goes to Jerusalem. Once there, he encounters the Roman governor of Judea and Syria, Felix, and enlists Felix to aid him in his quest. Under the knight's imperial authority, Felix announces that anyone in the land who has an object that was touched by Jesus should bring it forward. Anyone found to be hiding such an object from the Roman authorities is to be executed if their treachery is discovered.

Only one person comes forward in response to Felix's threats, an old woman named Veronica. She brings Felix a piece of cloth she has venerated since the Lord's crucifixion. She explains to Felix, "My lord, on the day that the Holy Prophet was led away to be crucified, I passed before Him carrying a piece of cloth to sell. He called me and beseeched me to lend Him this cloth to wipe His face, which was dripping with sweat. After He had done so, I folded the cloth and took it home. And when I unfolded it, I found Jesus' face as clear as if it had been painted on a wall. Since then I have kept it, and no matter how sick I have been, once I looked at it, I was completely healed."<sup>27</sup>

A similar tradition is found at the beginning of the fourteenth century (i.e., ca. 1300) in Roger d'Argenteuil's *Bible en françois*. The text in question has been translated into Middle English. I have added modern spellings of certain words in brackets in the interest of making the passage more readable. The text states,

Then þere [there] went tofor[n] [before] oure Lord an holi woman callid [called] Veronica, þat [that] bare a couerchif to

selle at the cheping [market]. And when she saugh [saw] oure Lord so foule [fouly] brought and vilanously, she made gret [great] sorou and wepid [wept] and toke him the couerchif and seid, "Iesu, . . . I am right sory of this martirdom þat [that] thou suffrist without reson. But hold this couerchif and wipe away the swet and the blood from thi [thy] blissid [blessed] visage." And so he did. And there withall sodeinly was the visage of oure Lord purtraied [portrayed] in the couerchif as like it had ben his said visage fleishly. And than oure Lord toke to Veronica hir couerchif ageyn [again] and bad [bade] hir that she shuld kepe it wele, for it shal hele [heal] many sekenessis [sicknesses].<sup>28</sup>

### Along the *Via Dolorosa*

At this point, our thoughts on the legend of St. Veronica must turn to how she came to play a role in the Stations of the Cross, the primary way modern Christians have encountered her.

Bonaventure A. Brown, writing on "Stations of the Cross" in the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (second edition),<sup>29</sup> explains that the first coherently related stations outside of Palestine were created at the church of San Stefano in Bologna in the fifth century. However, the piety of the stations really took off in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries as knights who had visited the important holy places related to Jesus's trial, execution, and death in Jerusalem returned home from the crusades.

In 1342, the Franciscans were given custody over key holy sites in Jerusalem. This was vital to the growth in popularity of the stations as the Franciscans promoted devotion to both the sites themselves and the passion of Jesus. The spiritual devotion of the stations was introduced into Franciscan monasteries and friary chapels, and this eventually spread to parish churches. It should be noted, however, that the number of the stations has varied greatly, from only five stations in the previously mentioned church of San Stefano to twenty or thirty or even more stations!

As one might imagine, with such variation in the number of stations, the subjects represented (i.e., the moments in Christ's life) varied greatly throughout the centuries. For example, the number of Jesus's falls on his way to Golgotha varied from one to as many as seven. Further, famous gospel scenes such as the "Ecce homo!" ("Behold the man!") exchange between Pilate and Jesus were ancient staples in the stations, but have since fallen out of use. For our purposes, we can note that the presence of St. Veronica in the stations is a relatively recent addition.<sup>30</sup> This should hardly surprise us, given the liquidity of the traditions related to her.

The Polish historian and artist Ewa Kuryluk indicates in her 1991 study, *Veronica and Her Cloth: History, Symbolism, and Structure of a "True" Image*, that St. Veronica's presence in the stations can be dated at least to the late fifteenth century. This conclusion is based on information found in the itinerary of the English professor William Wey, written to detail his pilgrimages to Jerusalem in 1458 and again in 1462. In particular, I refer to a portion of his first itinerary (from 1458) entitled *Loca Sancta in stacionibus*

*Jerusalem*. In this section, Wey lists a total of two sets of stations in Jerusalem (the first of which lists twenty-three and the second lists twenty-two). The sixth station of Wey's first list is abbreviated "sudar" (for *sudarium*, referring to Veronica's veil) and notes, "*locus ubi vidua sive Veronica posuit sudarium super faciem Christi*"<sup>31</sup> (This is the place where the widowed Veronica touched her veil to the face of Christ). Kuryluk states that, according to Wey, "at station number six pilgrims were shown the house of Veronica, standing next to that of Pilate, in front of which Jesus broke down under the burden of his cross. No doubt, they were also told about blood and sweat streaming from Jesus' face, and about an admirable woman rushing out with her veil, handkerchief, napkin, or apron to assist the Lord."<sup>32</sup>

## Conclusions

Obviously, there is more to the story. There always is when it comes to Christian tradition, but we have accomplished our limited goal of tracing the evolution of the legend of St. Veronica. Perhaps there is one final thing to consider: Why does the legend of St. Veronica resonate with us so? I leave you with my thoughts on the matter.

As a Christian, I look to Jesus as the model for my life. However, if the truth be told, I must confess that I am horrified at his death. If ever there was a good and honest person who walked this planet, it was Jesus. He was absolutely selfless, known for giving to those in need and for speaking the truth regardless of whether or not that truth was convenient. Yet, for all he did for others, he was shamefully treated and disposed of as if he were not even human. What seems even worse to me is how so many of his closest friends betrayed, denied, and abandoned him when he needed them most (see Mark 14). This ugly truth seems almost inconceivable.

In my darkest moments, when my faith is most profoundly challenged, I comfort myself by telling myself that I would not have abandoned my Lord, that, as his friend, I would have stayed with him. However, I am deeply troubled by the fact that all of his disciples told him the same thing (Mark 14:27–31). Deep down, I know that, despite my best intentions, I cannot know what I will do until that moment of trial—and so I pray to be ready for that moment.

I look to Veronica as a sign of hope. Whether Veronica is a literary creation or an actual historical woman, she represents the very best in us. She represents the part of us that finds the grace to remain firm in great distress. She is the part of us that is open to the grace that comes to us when we need it most. She represents the ability in each of us to act as Jesus would act in a given situation, the ability to be a *vera icon* of Jesus Christ in this world, a new Veronica.

## Notes

1. Related to the evolution of the legends about the woman Veronica are devotional practices associated with the image itself, whether

a particular image known as the *sudarium* (a sweat cloth or handkerchief) housed in Rome and promoted by Pope Innocent III (1198–1216), thought to be the authentic Veronica, or the myriad copies made for local churches or personal devotion. See Laura Katrine Skinnebach, "The solace of his image': Images and Presence in Late Medieval Devotional Practice," in *Instruments of Devotion: The Practices and Objects of Religious Piety from the Late Middle Ages to the 20th Century*, ed. Henning Laugerud and idem (Aarhus, Denmark: Aarhus University Press, 2007), 189–207. Regarding artistic and aesthetic aspects of the Veronica images, see Jeffery F. Hamburger, "Vision and the Veronica," in idem, *The Visual and the Visionary:*

*Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany* (New York, NY: Zone Books, 1998), 317–82. Hamburger's collection of pictures of the Veronica dating largely from the fifteenth century and his accompanying discussion is absolutely magnificent. I also highly recommend Gerhard Wolf, "From Mandylion to Veronica: Picturing the 'Disembodied' Face and Disseminating the True Image of Christ in the Latin West," in *The Holy Face and the Paradox of Representation: Papers from a Colloquium Held at the Bibliotheca Hertziana, Rome and the Villa Spelman, Florence, 1996*, ed. Herbert L. Kessler and idem (Villa Spelman Colloquia 6; Bologna: Nuova Alfa Editoriale, 1998), 153–79; and Jean-Michel Maldamé, "L'image de dévotion dans la vie chrétienne," *Recherches Philosophiques* 1 (2005): 75–100.

2. I have deliberately chosen not to begin my discussion with what Alvin Earle Ford has called "the biblical tradition," i.e., gospel texts such as Matt 9:20–22 (the healing of the woman with a hemorrhage), Luke 23:27–28 (Jesus's encounter with weeping women along the *Via Dolorosa*), and Mark 15:40–41 (unnamed women at the crucifixion). None of these texts expressly mentions her, and there is no reason to link the woman healed of a hemorrhage with the women who witness the crucifixion (*La Vengeance de Notre-Seigneur: The Old and Middle French Prose Versions; The Version of Japheth* [Studies and Texts 63; Toronto, Canada: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1984], 3–5). Likewise, I will not analyze the Abgar legend, thought by some scholars (e.g., Ford, *La Vengeance*, 9–11) to have a significant influence. It is first found in a simple form in Eusebius's *Ecclesiastical History* (fourth century), 1.13 (cf. also 2.1.6–7) and also in the Syriac *Teaching of Addai* (early 5th century). Eusebius relates how Abgar writes to Jesus and asks him to come and heal him (1.13.1–5). Jesus replies via letter, promising to send one of his disciples. After the resurrection, Thomas sends Thaddeus, one of the seventy apostles (Luke 10), to Edessa. Eusebius tells us that he has a Syriac document from the archives in Edessa. He then provides transcripts of the two letters as well as an extended extract from this Syriac source recounting Thaddeus's work in Edessa. The Syriac version found in the *Teaching of Addai* includes the pious detail that the man who delivered Abgar's letter to Jesus, Hanan the archivist, after meeting with Jesus and hearing his reply to Abgar, "took and painted the portrait of Jesus with choice pigments, since he was the king's artist, and brought it with him to his lord King Abgar" (George Howard, trans., *The Teaching of Addai, Texts and Translations* 16 [Early Christian Literature Series 4; Chico, CA: Scholars, 1981], 9–10). According to John Oliver Hand, this portrait has a rather intriguing history of its own: "A relic associated with this legend and known as the Mandylion was taken from Edessa to Constantinople in 944; there it became the type of numerous distinctive images of the face produced in all the artistic mediums of the Byzantine tradition. The Edessa Mandylion was supposedly sold to St. Louis, removed to the Sainte-Chapelle in Paris by 1241, and presumably destroyed during the French Revolution" ("Salve sancta facies: Some Thoughts on the Iconography of the Head of Christ by Petrus Christus," *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 27 [1992]: 10). See Han J. W. Drijvers, "The Image of Edessa in

the Syriac Tradition,” in Herbert L. Kessler and Gerhard Wolf, eds., *The Holy Face and the Paradox of Representation: Papers from a Colloquium Held at the Bibliotheca Hertziana, Rome and the Villa Spelman, Florence, 1996* (Villa Spelman Colloquia 6; Bologna: Nuova Alfa Editoriale, 1998), 13–31. The Abgar legend and the Veronica legend seem to have developed along parallel tracks during much the same period, but I remain uncertain as to relational ties between them. See also Ford, *La Vengeance de Nostre-Seigneur* (1984), 9–10.

3. In *Speculum ecclesiae* 6, Gerald of Wales discusses the legends associated with both the Uronica and the Veronica. Gerald explains that the Uronica is a painted portrait of Jesus rendered (amid much trial and error) by Luke after Jesus’s resurrection at the behest of his mother, Mary. According to Gerald, this painting was subsequently covered in gold and silver and is housed in the Lateran at Rome. He then discusses the Veronica (the “true image” which he claims is housed at St. Peter’s in Rome) and Veronica herself, whom Gerald calls a “matron,” noting how she is the same woman healed of a flow of blood. In addition, Gerald describes how Veronica had long desired to see the Lord, how she encountered him coming from the temple, and that the Lord took her veil and wiped his face with it, leaving behind the impression of his countenance. (There is no indication that this encounter has anything to do with Jesus’s crucifixion.) Gerald explains the verbal connection between the name of the matron and the actual image: “Dicunt autem quidam vocabulo alludentes, Veronicam dici, quasi veram iconiam, id est, imaginem veram” (So they said, making a pun about her name, “Call her Veronica, from ‘true icon’ [veram iconiam], because it is a true image”). Latin text from J. S. Brewer, James F. Dimock, and George F. Warner, eds., *Giraldi Cambrensis, Opera*, Rolls Series 21 (London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1861–91), 4.278–79. In finding this reference in Gerald of Wales, I am in the debt of Dr. Edward Coleman of the University College in Dublin.

4. Ford, *La Vengeance*, 8–9.

5. Quotations from the *Acts of Pilate* are taken from Bart D. Ehrman and Zlatko Pleše, *The Apocryphal Gospels: Texts and Translations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). Beyond the brief introduction by Ehrman and Pleše (419–23), an extremely helpful introduction to the *Gospel of Nicodemus* is Zbigniew Izydorczyk’s “Introduction,” in *The Medieval Gospel of Nicodemus: Texts, Intertexts, and Contexts in Western Europe*, ed. idem, *Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies* 158 (Tempe, AZ: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1997), 1–19. A particularly intriguing facet of Izydorczyk’s discussion is the level of respect, almost to the point of veneration, given the *Gospel of Nicodemus* vis-à-vis the canonical texts by Latin scribes and editors and the vernacular translators; see especially pp. 12–13.

6. For example, Hans-Josef Klauck dates the *Acts of Pilate* 1–16 to “the first decades of the fourth century” (*Apocryphal Gospels: An Introduction* [London: T & T Clark International, 2003], 91). Ehrman and Pleše hold a similar opinion, with the proviso that “given the extensive variation in the textual tradition of the text, it is also possible that there were multiple forms of the tradition circulating in different times and places” (*Apocryphal Gospels*, 420). On the other hand, J. K. Elliott regards what he calls “the general consensus” as dating the *Acts of Pilate* to “the fifth-sixth century.” Sadly, he does not indicate which authors in his bibliography hold such a view (*The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation Based on M. R. James* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1999], 165). Perhaps he is making reference to G. C. O’Ceallaigh, one author he cites who holds to a sixth-century dating (at the earliest). O’Ceallaigh, who calls the text the *Commentaries of Nicodemus*, argues for a *terminus post quem* of 555 based on internal evidence (“Dating the Commentaries of Nicodemus,” *Harvard Theological Review* 56 [1963]: 49–58).

7. The earliest known indication that such a document might exist (and this is far from certain) is two brief references by Justin in 1 *Apol-*

*ogy* 35.9 and 48.3. In 35.9, Justin states, “And that these things happened you can learn from the *Acts Recorded under Pontius Pilate* (*ek tōn epi Pontiou Pilotou gegomenōn aktōn*).” The exact same phrase appears in 48.3. In both places, Justin renders the Latin *actum* in Greek (*aktōn*). For the Greek text, see Denis Minns and Paul Parvis, *Justin, Philosopher and Martyr: Apologies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 176–77 and 202–03. Personally, I see nothing in the references of Justin to convince me that he knew of a story as we now have it in the *Acts of Pilate*. Other early references are found in Tertullian (*Apology* 5 and 21). Ch. 5 refers to Tiberius receiving “intelligence from Palestine of events which had clearly shown the truth of Christ’s divinity,” and ch. 21 reiterates this, noting how Pilate sent word of Jesus Christ to Tiberius. Eusebius in *Ecclesiastical History* 9.5.1 (see also 9.7.1) speaks about a forged work entitled the *Acts of Pilate* written during the reign of Maximinus II (as Caesar in the East, 305–308, Augustus in the East, 310–312). Finally, there is evidence of a Christian *Acts of Pilate* in Epiphanius of Salamis, *Panarion* 50.1.5–8. See Felix Scheidweiler, “The Gospel of Nicodemus, Acts of Pilate and Christ’s Descent into Hell,” in *New Testament Apocrypha*, vol. 1, *Gospels and Related Writings*, ed. W. Schneemelcher (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1963), 444–48.

8. This person seems to be a conflation between the paralytic of Mark 2:1–12 and a similar story in John 5:1–9. When we compare *Acts of Pilate* 6.1 with the two gospel stories, we see that the man who testifies to Jesus’s healing of his paralysis states that that he had suffered in great pain for thirty-eight years; John 5:5 specifies that the man had been paralyzed for thirty-eight years. On the other hand, the man in *Acts of Pilate* 6.1 mentions how “several young men” carried him and his pallet to Jesus (cf. Mark 2:3–4), while John notes specifically that the paralytic had no one to help him (5:7).

9. It appears that this is a mistaken reference to Jesus’s Sabbath healing of the woman with the crooked back (Luke 13:10–17). This error may be intentional given the deliberate exclusion of Beronikē’s testimony based on her gender.

10. The story of Jesus’s miraculous healing of a leper appears in Matt 8:1–4, Mark 1:40–45, and Luke 5:12–16.

11. The general dating of seventh or eighth century is suggested by Ehrman and Pleše (*Apocryphal Gospels*, 537–38). On the other hand, Izydorczyk is more precise with regard to its provenance, locating its composition in northern Italy, but less certain as to its dating, placing it sometime between the fifth and eighth centuries (“Introduction,” 8). For additional discussion, see Izydorczyk, “The *Evangelium Nicodemi* in the Latin Middle Ages,” in *The Medieval Gospel of Nicodemus*, ed. idem, 57–59; and Thomas N. Hall, “The *Euangelium Nichodemi* and *Vindicta saluatoris* in Anglo Saxon England,” in *Two Old English Apocrypha and their Manuscript Source: “The Gospel of Nichodemus” and “The Avenging of the Saviour,”* ed. J. E. Cross, *Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England* 19 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 36–81, esp. 62–64.

12. I am indebted to Alvin Earle Ford’s concise description of the voluminous variations in the manuscript traditions. See *La Vengeance de Nostre-Seigneur: The Old and Middle French Prose Versions, the Cura sanitatis Tiberii (The Mission of Volusian), the Nathanis Judaei legatio (Vindicta salvatoris)*, *Studies and Texts* 115 (Toronto, ON: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1993), 7–18.

13. Ford, *La Vengeance*, 10.

14. In some manuscripts, the Romans are aware that Jesus has been executed, and the emperor charges the envoy to bring a disciple or, in one variant, Veronica herself. See Ford, *La Vengeance*, 11–12.

15. Izydorczyk, “The *Evangelium Nicodemi*,” 57–58.

16. Dating suggested by Izydorczyk, who suggests southern Gaul as a possible place of composition (“Introduction,” 8). Ehrman and Pleše generally concur with his dating (*Apocryphal Gospels*, 538). The excerpt that follows is their translation.

17. Heidi J. Hornik, *Michele Tosini and the Ghirlandaio Workshop in Cinquecento Florence* (East Sussex: Sussex Academic, 2009), 12–13.

18. Mary Swan, “Remembering Veronica in Anglo-Saxon England,” in *Writing Gender and Genre in Medieval Literature: Approaches to Old and Middle English Texts*, ed. Elaine Treharne and Greg Walker (Cambridge: Brewer, 2002), 19–39.

19. Swan, “Remembering Veronica,” 25.

20. Swan, “Remembering Veronica,” 31. These textual variants can be found in J. E. Cross, ed., *Two Old English Apocrypha and their Manuscript Source*, 270–73 and 280–81.

21. Eamon Duffy describes the complexity of the construction of the *Golden Legend* and states, “the *Legenda* was never intended as straightforward devotional reading for the ordinary layman, although it would eventually be adapted for just such use. It was essentially a handbook for preachers, a quarry from which material could be extracted, to be presented more palatably and discursively in the pulpit” (“Introduction to the 2012 edition,” in *Jacobus de Voragine, The Golden Legend, Readings on the Saints*, 2nd ed., trans. William Granger Ryan [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012], xiii–xiv). All quotations from this text are taken from this edition. For an interesting (if somewhat anachronistic) analysis of the reasons behind the popularity of the *Legenda Aurea*, see Sherry L. Reames, *The Legenda aurea: A Reexamination of Its Paradoxical History* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), esp. 197–209. Reames recognizes the *Golden Legend*’s extreme popularity among clerics and laity alike, pointing to the “hundreds of surviving manuscripts” (197). Reames notes that clergymen of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries preferred the *Legenda* to its rival legends “by a margin of about forty to one” (198). She builds on the work of André Vauchez (*La sainteté en Occident aux derniers siècles du Moyen Age d’après les procès de canonisation et les documents hagiographiques*, Bibliothèque des Ecoles françaises d’Athènes et de Rome 241 [Rome: École française de Rome, 1981]), describing how selecting candidates for sainthood after 1270 was influenced strongly by a conservative elite among the clergy deeply concerned that “the cult of the saints had begun to foster a democratic conception of the church instead of a hierarchical one” (202). Reames argues that “the *Legenda*’s popularity among the clergy must have been based on political expediency” (203). She further notes the lack of available options, stating, “most laymen had no opportunity whatever to choose between the *Legenda* and the alternative books in the genre” (204). Reames’s ideas, while in many ways absolutely plausible, impose modern standards of ecclesial and social equality on the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries that may not have been possible for the clergy and laity to conceive, let alone choose, given their educational and cultural situations.

22. Ehrman and Pleše (*Apocryphal Gospels*, 559) argue this, relying on Jacques-Noël Pérès (“Mort de Pilate,” in *Écrits apocryphes chrétiens*, ed. Pierre Geoltrain and Jean-Daniel Kaestli [Paris: Gallimard, 2005], 2.402–403). Pérès points to Jacobus’s comments regarding his source material for the stories concerning Pilate: “what follows is what we read in a history, admittedly apocryphal (*in quadam historia licet apocrypha*), concerning the origin and punishment of Pilate” (*Jacobus de Voragine, The Golden Legend, Readings on the Saints*, 211).

23. The variant of the story of how Veronica acquired the image of Jesus from *Mors Pilati* is as follows: “When my Lord went about preaching and I was, very much against my will, deprived of his presence, I wished to have his image painted for me, that when I was deprived of his presence, at least the figure of his image might give me some solace. As I was taking a linen-cloth to the painter to paint it, my Lord met me and inquired where I was heading. When I disclosed to him the reason for my journey, he asked me for the kerchief and handed it back to me printed with the image of his venerable face. Therefore, if your lord will devoutly behold the sight of this, he will immediately obtain the benefit of health” (Ehrman and Pleše, *Apocryphal Gospels*, 563, 565). In

further clarifying the sources employed by Jacobus de Voragine, Pérès states, in agreement with Joachim Knape, that the author of the *Historia Apocrypha* “has obviously seen and transformed the *Vengeance of the Savior*” (“Mort de Pilate,” 403). See Knape, “Die ‘Historia apocrypha’ der ‘Legenda aurea,’” in *Zur Deutung von Geschichte in Antike und Mittelalter: Plinius d. J. ‘Panegyricus,’ ‘Historia apocrypha’ der ‘Legenda aurea,’* ed. idem and Karl Strobel, *Bamberger Hochschulschriften 11* (Bamberg: Bayerische Verlagsanstalt, 1985), 113–72. However, the *Vengeance of the Savior* cannot be regarded as the source of this poignant story of how Veronica received the image as a result of Jesus’s act of kindness; it merely states that Veronica received the image “that the Lord gave to me, not for my merits but out [of] his mercy” (*quem dominus dedit mihi, non meis meritis sed sua clementia*). So, where did the author of *Mors Pilati* find this tradition, or was it created here? I have not been able to discover the answer. See Tobias Nicklas (“Gedanken zum Verhältnis zwischen christlichen Apokryphen und hagiographischen Literatur: das Beispiel der Veronica-Traditionen,” *Nederlands theologisch tijdschrift* 62, no. 1 [2008]: 45–63, esp. 56–61), who notes structural parallels between the *Teaching of Addai* and the *Mors Pilati* (59–60), but stops short of drawing a direct connection.

24. Anne L. Clark supports this idea, asserting, “The origin of the veil is narrated in the *Legenda Aurea* of Jacobus de Voragine (c. 1260), which, with its more than 1,000 manuscript copies, was unquestionably the most widespread version of the Veronica story” (“Venerating the Veronica: Varieties of Passion Piety in the Later Middle Ages,” *Material Religion* 3, no. 2 [2007]: 170).

25. Clark explains, “In the *Legenda Aurea*, the story is placed in the chapter of materials assembled for the annual celebration of the Passion of the Lord, which, not surprisingly, emphasizes that the ‘passion of Christ was bitter in its pains, [and] scornful in the mockery it laid upon him.’ Thus even without an explicit Calvary setting, the story of Veronica’s cloth, with its miraculously produced true image of Christ, was explicitly imbued with Passion associations” (“Venerating the Veronica,” 170).

26. In reality, Vespasian was Titus’s father. Clearly, the author is shaky on historical detail.

27. Taken from Carol A. Chase, trans., *Lancelot-Grail: The Old French Arthurian Vulgate and Post-Vulgate in Translation*, vol. 1, *The History of the Holy Grail* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewster, 2010), 20.

28. Text taken from Phyllis Moe, ed., *The ME Prose Translation of Roger d’Argenteuil’s Bible en françois*, *Middle English Texts* 6 (Heidelberg: Winter, 1977), 62.

29. “Stations of the Cross,” in *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed. (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 2003), 13.499–501.

30. Herbert Thurston notes that the first mention of a station associated with Veronica in the Holy Land is made by Hans Lochner, a medical doctor and pilgrim from Nuremberg, Germany, in 1435 (*The Stations of the Cross: An Account of their History and Devotional Purpose* [repr.; London: Burns & Oates, 1914], 60). See the account of Lochner’s travels in *Die Hohenzollern am heiligen Grabe zu Jerusalem, insbesondere die Pilgerfahrt der Markgrafen Johann und Albrecht von Brandenburg im Jahre 1435*, ed. Felix Geisheim (Berlin: Franz Duncker, 1858).

31. For a modern translation, see Francis Davey, ed., *The Itineraries of William Wey* (Oxford: University of Oxford, 2010). The Latin text is taken from Albert Way, Bulkeley Bandinel, and George Williams, eds., *The Itineraries of William Wey, Fellow of Eton College: To Jerusalem, A.D. 1458 and A.D. 1462; and to Saint James of Compostella, A.D. 1456. From the Original Manuscript in the Bodleian Library* (London: Nichols and Sons, 1857), 20. See Thurston’s discussion, “The Stations of the Cross,” 46–48 and 50–52.

32. Ewa Kuryluk, *Veronica and Her Cloth: History, Symbolism, and Structure of a “True” Image* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 123.

St. Veronica – Evolution of a Sacred Legend. Save to Library. Download. Saint Veronica, also known as Berenike, was a woman from Jerusalem who lived in the 1st century AD, according to extra-biblical Christian sacred tradition. A celebrated saint in many pious Christian countries, the 17th-century *Acta Sanctorum* published by the Bollandists listed her feast under July 12, but the German Jesuit scholar Joseph Braun cited her commemoration in *Festi Marianni* on 13 January. Saint Veronica, also known as Saint Berenice, was the pious woman from Jerusalem who wiped the face of Jesus Christ with her while He was on the way to Calvary carrying His Cross. According to tradition, the cloth was imprinted with the image of Christ's face. Article by Anna.