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Lucia Travaini: *I Trenta denari di Giuda*

I Trenta denari di Giuda is a fascinating new book of Lucia Travaini, Italian numismatist and recognised scholar on medieval coinage. In this book she seeks to reconstruct an eventful and perhaps partly surprising history of the so-called thirty pieces of silver of Judas Iscariot. According to the Gospel of Matthew, Judas received this sum of money when he betrayed Jesus to the chief priest. Travaini's idea is to approach this theme through the eyes of those who became a part of the story of the coins ("intendo presentare la storia dei Trenta denari con gli occhi degli attori che ne ebbero parte", 13). While the period she surveys is a long one (from the history of coins in the era of Abraham to our days), the clear focus of the study is in the medieval and early modern period. The list of groups that she examines is quite extensive. Thus under "pairs of eyes", she includes for example Judas himself, those who exposed the coins as relics, pilgrims, devotees, and artists who redecorated, replicated and reinterpreted coins in iconography or prepared containers for them. There are also the people who studied coins, collected them and criticized their claimed origins or authenticity as religious relics as well.

Lucia Travaini's volume starts in an appealing way, combining self-reflection from the path of the study of these special coins and more general historiography of the venerated coinage in the Catholic Europe. Besides her expertise on medieval coinage, Travaini's best ability is to provide a lucid history of thirty pieces of silver, loosely following the chronological line of events and expressions in which coins or their representations played a part. Travaini meticulously brings to our awareness every individual example of the silver coins described in texts or pictures as well as those examples still existing in the collections of different institutions. She studies every coin or its representation thematically as a part of groups of coinage in different historical contexts such as pilgrimage or Protestant criticism. Travaini's ambitious scope aims to collect all the possible sources which present Judas's coinage, not only medieval and early modern texts but also the representations of coins in art works from the same period. She follows the numismatic studies of these special pieces of money from the sixteenth century to today.

Beside the "narrative" and analytical part of her book, Travaini offers two extensive appendices in the end of her volume. The first is an inventory of the documented examples from the group of thirty coins, based on older inventories but enlarged by her with new examples of the coins (both still existing and disappeared, mentioned in documents) from European churches, museums and archives. The second is a repertory of most central sources which narrate the story of thirty pieces of silver (edited by Francesco D'Angelo). A special favor for the reader is that all the reproduced texts are presented in their original language (in Latin or vernaculars, such as German, Italian, Catalan, and English; only Greek is not presented) and translated into modern Italian.

The task of bringing to light all the sources and existing objects connected to the thirty silver coins and of analyzing them in the contexts of devotion and pilgrimage, hagiographical narrative and scientifically oriented texts from the medieval to the early modern era is a challenging one. On the one hand, Lucia Travaini's book presents a very representative cross section of approaches to the history of Judas's money. On the other hand, the analysis remains in places somewhat superficial (the reader would have expected more profound contextualization of the significance of Judas's coins for the medieval and early modern communities). Yet *I Trenta denari di Giuda* succeeds in giving a vast (and delightful) range of interesting details related to the single coins and their perception. Doing so, it also provokes the reader to view the subject matter in the relatively traditional manner of a repertory. For example, some level of problematizing the concept of a relic beyond the theoretical view and as a part of everyday devotion or lived religion in wide European cultural

diversity from the Middle Ages to the Early Modern period would have deepened the discussion. A more profound discussion of medieval definitions regarding the differences between the copies of coins and thirty pieces of silver understood as "real relics" would have greatly served the reader (see p. 149).

Nonetheless, Lucia Travaini's *I Trenta denari di Giuda* is a highly welcomed addition to the little studied theme of Judas's thirty pieces of silver and will probably remain as the corner stone of the topic for a long time. The volume will be extremely valuable for further studies not only on thirty pieces of silver but on wider materializing of the history of Christ's passion in the late medieval and early modern period.

One must also admire the author's braveness, as Travaini herself confesses in the beginning of her book that she has confronted several themes which she had not studied before preparing *I Trenta denari di Giuda*. These themes include such vast fields as for example hagiography and iconography of Judas and thirty pieces of silver, pilgrimage guide-books, relics, and anti-Judaism (13). Nevertheless, she successfully takes grip of several large thematic contexts in reconstructing the eventful history of thirty pieces of silver in front of the eyes of the reader.

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Rezension von:

Marika Räsänen
Cultural History / Turku Centre for Medieval and Early Modern Studies, University of Turku

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