

How many times Jesus wept? *Lachrimae Christi* topos in Medieval Sermon Literature (abstract)

This essay studies the role of literary *topoi* or commonplaces in medieval sermon literature by using the *lachrimae Christi* topos as a case study. It is a commonplace that can be found in nearly all the thirteenth and early fourteenth century sermon collections from the tenth Sunday after the Holy Trinity. On that Sunday the Gospel reading was taken from Luke 19:41–48. The most common *thema* on that Sunday was *Videns civitatem Jhesus flevit super illam*. This passage tells how Jesus entered the city of Jerusalem, and seeing the city from surrounding hills he wept over it and prophesied that it will be destroyed in such a manner that there will not be a stone upon a stone left.

The writers of the thirteenth century bible commentaries and sermon collections started to wonder how many times Jesus actually wept whilst in this world. They found three cases in the New Testament, and around the middle of the century a fourth one was added to what by then had become a topos that is in this essay is called *lachrimae Christi* topos.

The article shows that, as Augustine wrote, every single action undertaken by Jesus was meant to teach us. Therefore all the cases of Jesus crying were given a spiritual interpretation that was sometimes widely accepted and immutable from one sermon to other; in some cases there were various possible interpretations.

The *lachrimae Christi* topos did not only work as a means of expounding the gospel message, but it soon started to play an important role in the structure of the sermons taking place on that particular Sunday. The utmost example of this tendency is the model sermon of Italian Dominican Jacopo da Varazze whose fivefold division of a sermon is built completely around the five cases of Jesus crying.

Hence it can be argued that literary *topoi* played a twofold role in model sermon collections. They helped the preachers to arrange the material and message they wanted to convey to their audiences, and furthermore they helped the preachers to organise the very structure of their sermons.

Jussi Hanska, Ph.D., Finnish Academy Research Fellow

Dept. of History, FIN-33014 University of Tampere, Finland

hijuva@uta.fi