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MARTIN NIMIRA OF RAB, *THE SERMON ON THE PASSION
OF OUR LORD* (ROME, AFTER APRIL 3, 1494)

On Good Friday 1494, Martin Nimira, archdeacon of Rab and scion of a well-regarded Rab family, delivered a sermon on the Passion to Pope Alexander VI and members of the papal curia. After April 3 that same year the sermon was printed in Rome by Eucharius Silber. Nimira built his career in the Papal States of Italy as a client of the cardinal of Siena Francesco Todeschini Piccolomini (1439–1503); some years earlier, in March 1487, Nimira had already preached before the Roman cardinals, on the feast of Saint Thomas Aquinas in the Dominican church of Santa Maria sopra Minerva. Nimira's known writings and activities (a poetic prayer for the health of the cardinal Todeschini Piccolomini *Hecatosticum carmen ad Christum optimum maximum pro cardinalis Senensis salute*, perhaps in 1488; his copyediting of the *Politics* of Aristotle translated by Leonardo Bruni and commented on by Thomas Aquinas and Ludovico Valenza, 1492) suggest Nimira was a curial humanist, dependent on the patronage of the Roman court and its cardinals.

Nimira's sermon on the Passion, in the printed edition dedicated to the cardinal Bernardin López de Carvajal (d. 1523), bishop of Cartagena, Spain, displays Nimira's learning, his command of theological, philosophical and lyrical registers of expression, as well as oratorical elegance and a readiness to adopt Cicero's rhetorical models (sentences from speeches *Against Verres* 2, 5, *For Publius Quinctius* and *For Aulus Cluentius*, as well as the famous fragment of Gaius Gracchus reported by Cicero in *On the Orator*). The sermon has an introduction, two main parts, and a short closing prayer for God's mercy, especially to the Pope.

The first part is philosophical (in Nimira's words, stemming from *ingenium*), the second part lyrical (arising from *pietas*). The philosophical part considers the necessity of Christ's Passion and death, touching also on the suffering of the good and the success of the evil in this world, while the lyrical part shows how Christ suffered and died. There is a prosopopoeia of the Virgin Mary, and the piercing of Christ's body is seen as the culmination of his suffering. The Jews (including Judas Iscariot) are presented as the main enemies, their faith as utterly wrong and depraved (confirmation is presented in a collage of biblical quotes), and the piercing of Christ's body is seen as their most terrible crime. The extremely strong antisemitic tone of Nimira's sermon might have been set partly by the tradition of the liturgical *Improperia* as part of the observance of the Passion, partly by the rhetorical need to contrast blame (of the Jews) and praise (of Christ), but possibly also by the antisemitic leanings in the circle of Nimira's acquaintances: these must have included Antonio Lollo, the secretary of the cardinal Todeschini Piccolomini, who had already in 1486 composed another highly antisemitic sermon before the Pope, and the Dominican Paolo Moneglia from Genova, who as the *magister*

Sacri palatii chose Nimira as the preacher for the Good Friday of 1494; in April of the same year Moneglia was appointed inquisitor of the March of Genoa, which was under strain because of the influx of large numbers of Sephardic Jews and Marranos expelled from Spain and Sicily (later, in Rome in 1498, Moneglia led a spectacular *auto da fé* of several hundred Marranos in front of St. Peter's Basilica).

The success of Nimira's sermon can be inferred from the privileges granted to his family by the cardinal Todeschini Piccolomini later in 1494, from the relatively large number of printed copies of Nimira's small book that survive today (32 in public libraries), from the record of Nimira's preaching in the diaries of Johannes Burchard, papal Master of Ceremonies, and from those who read Nimira's sermon during the Renaissance: we know that a copy of the sermon was owned by Marko Marulić, and that Giovanni Mercurio da Vipera (bishop of Bagnoregio 1523–1527) quoted extensively from the philosophical part of the sermon in his *Contra a recto divini cultus itinere aberrantes* (Rome 1522).

We present an edition of Nimira's sermon following a digital facsimile of a copy in Bavarian State Library. In the edition, the abbreviations are expanded, orthographic variants of *ae*, *u* and *i* are removed, the punctuation is modernized, the spelling and capitalization standardized. Nimira's explicit and implicit textual sources are identified wherever possible.

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