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Shades of Identity: An Iconographic Approach to the Early Christian Burial Chambers in Sopianae (Pannonia)

Csigi, Péter János

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Péter Csigi

Shades of Identity

An Iconographic Approach to the Early Christian
Burial Chambers in Sopianae (Pannonia)

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Abstract

There are several burial chambers in the Late Antique cemetery of the Roman town of Sopianae in Pannonia province (modern Hungary) decorated with wall paintings resembling Roman catacomb art. These underground chambers from the second half of the fourth century contain both specifically Christian images as well as general motifs in Roman funerary art. Via the iconographic analysis of the decorations in the SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber and the Burial Chamber with the Jar, the identity of the commissioners can be assumed. The various iconographic elements and the compositions as a whole were used in the different levels of contemporaneous communication, which will be interpreted through the concept of 'language games' according to Ludwig Wittgenstein's epistemology. Six hypotheses explaining the repertoire of biblical scenes in early Christian artefacts are investigated and evaluated. The question of the presence of martyr relics (especially that of the Sancti Quattro Coronati) in this cemetery is considered and relevant hypotheses evaluated. The iconographic parallels of the key motifs in the SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber, such as the Christogram and the images of Peter and Paul, are presented and compared to examples in art from Rome and the Balkans and interpreted as showing 'family resemblances' also in the Wittgensteinian sense. The identification of an ambiguous wall painting in the same chamber is attempted by proposing a hypothesis of an intentionally ambiguous image combining the Three Youths in the Fiery Furnace and the Adoration of the Magi in a single picture. The religious identification of the Burial Chamber with the Jar is studied by questioning the validity of the concept of 'neutrality' in Late Antique art. Late Antiquity is interpreted in the framework of mutually enriching interactions between different religious groups via the notion of 'lived religion'.

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Introduction

*The pictures located on the walls
are eloquent by their silence
and offer significant testimony.
(Gregory of Nyssa)*

The start of this thesis' writing was marked by a trip to Rome in early 2011. At the time, the theme of the present work had not yet been exactly specified, what was only sure was that it would be on early Christian iconography. That visit gave the opportunity to visit numerous early Christian monuments in Rome from the catacombs through several churches to many museums. At these visits, I was accompanied by scholars and other experts of early Christian artefacts who provided professional introduction to these Roman sites and artefacts. Studying the wall paintings, mosaics and sarcophagi throughout Rome evoked the memories of the familiar early Christian monuments of Pécs as being similar to those in Rome regarding their form and content. During this stay, it also became evident that the cemetery of the ancient town of Sopiana is less known to the wider public and there would be demand for its better recognition.

Hence, the motivation of the present thesis is twofold. Firstly, it will study the early Christian wall paintings from Sopiana, for which the author has a predilection. Secondly, the latest trends in Late Antique studies will be applied in the iconographic interpretations when approaching the Sopiana artefacts. The designated goal is to reveal some new shades on the palette of Late Antique studies. Its aim is to enrich the general image of early Christian artefacts and iconography with some details from the Late Antique cemetery of Sopiana and to expand the latter's interpretation. The approach of the present study will take into consideration the complexity of religious identities and institutions, the mutually inspiring interactions between different religious groups and the transition from a non-Christian to a predominantly Christian society (both on macro and micro levels) in Late Antiquity.

The aim of the first four chapters is to provide a foundation in methodology and approach. Therefore, in Chapter 1, the research history of the Sopiana cemetery will be presented and the concepts of 'language games' and 'lived religion' introduced, which will play key roles in the later interpretations. Chapter 2 will provide some preliminary remarks on early Christian artefacts from the third and fourth centuries, which are to be employed in the later considerations.

In Chapter 3, six hypotheses will be presented and then evaluated. They are typically used to give an explanation for the special repertoire of images on early Christian artefacts. Chapter 4 is to offer a brief introduction to the history of Pannonia and Sopiana, thus showing the special characters in Pannonian identity and bringing to light the development of Christian communities in the fourth century.

The other six chapters will deal with questions concerning the decorated burial chambers of the Sopiana cemetery. Chapter 5 is on the question of the presence of martyr relics in the cemetery. Before analysing and evaluating the existing hypotheses, two main elements of the fourth-century martyr cult will be studied: the buildings commemorating them and the translation of the relics.

The next two chapters analyze two principal elements in the decoration of the SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber, which reveal a great deal about the identities of the people in Sopiana. Chapter 6 studies the iconography of the apostles Peter and Paul, while Chapter 7 will show the significance of the Christogram on early Christian artefacts and particularly in the Sopiana cemetery.

The next two chapters will examine two open questions concerning the decoration on the side walls of the same burial chamber. In Chapter 8, a hypothesis will be proposed to solve the dilemma of the identification of an ambiguous image. Chapter 9 considers the possible identities for a perished image also in the SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber.

Chapter 10 is going to present another burial chamber of the Sopiana cemetery, the Burial Chamber with the Jar, which lacks any direct Christian reference. To gain a better understanding of such an iconographic program and to consider its religious identification, some remarks will be made on the concept of the so-called 'neutral' elements in early Christian artefacts. The final chapter, No. 11 will

reflect on the difficulties in studying the Roman monuments of Pannonia and suggest some directions that proffer further perspectives in the research of the area.

1. Research History and Methodology

The thesis begins with an overview of relevant research history and the present study's methodology. The research history will examine studies devoted to the better understanding of early Christian cemeteries in Sopianae. The second half of the chapter is divided into two further subchapters. The first one discusses Wittgenstein's 'language games' theory with the attempt to elicit useful techniques for the present study. The second subchapter maps out alternative approaches to the study of Late Antiquity and outlines their utilization in the ensuing analysis.

1.1. Research History of Sopianae

The research history of the early Christian monuments in Sopianae¹ started with the discovery of the SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber (No. I)² in 1782.³ (Figure 7) During the demolition of a medieval building, this burial chamber and thirteen other late Roman graves were discovered. These findings were first studied and published by Canon József Koller.⁴ Giovanni Battista de Rossi (1822-1894) dedicated three pages and two tables to the SS Peter and Paul Chamber.⁵ He dated the building to the fourth century arguing that an obviously Christian structure above the surface must have been built only after the Constantinian era.

¹ A thorough review of the research history of the late Antique cemetery in Sopianae is available in

² The numbering of the funerary buildings in Sopianae started with the SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber, which therefore has also been called Burial Chamber No I. (O. Gábor, 'A Pécsi késő antik temető épületeinek számozása' [The Numbering of the Buildings in the Late Antique cemetery of Pécs] (2007).)

³ The exact date of the discovery was debated for a long while. The correct date was determined by Ede Petrovich ('A pécsi káptalani levéltár épületének története. Die Geschichte des gebäudes des Domkapitelarchivs in Pécs – Fünfkirchen' (1963).) The original documents from the archive were published by László Boros (*A pécsi székesegyház a 18. században* [The Cathedral of Pécs in the Eighteenth Century] (1985), 61-2). István Lengvári listed the scholars who took the incorrect dating to 1780 from József Koller. ('Sopianae, a római Pécs kutatásának története' [Research History of Sopianae, Roman Pécs] (1999), 155, note 4).

⁴ J. Koller (Josephus Koller), 'Prolegomena', in *Historiam Episcopatus Quinqueecclesiarum* (1804), 33.

⁵ G. B. de Rossi, 'Fünfkirchen in Ungheria' (1874).

In the 1870s, Imre Henszlmann (1813-1888), an art historian and archaeologist, made comparisons between the early Christian burial chambers in Sopianae and the catacombs in Rome.⁶ In these, he mainly relied on De Rossi's studies on early Christian archaeology, and on this basis, aimed to identify the images in Sopianae. In the SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber, Henszlmann could still detect the third scene in the Jonah panel, in which a figure (according to Henszlmann a female) is lying under a pergola.⁷ He also suggested that the three Oriental figures on the opposite side should be identified as the Three Youths in the Fiery Furnace. (The identification of these three figures will be discussed in details later in Chapter 8.) And he identified the four men in the medallions on the vault as the people buried there. (Figure 16) (This question will return in Chapter 5.4.1.) It was Henszlmann who reported on the first attempts at restoring the wall paintings in the SS Peter and Paul Chamber which took place in 1864.⁸ (Figure 8)

The research of the early Christian monuments in Sopianae gained new intensity at the beginning of the twentieth century. Ottó Szőnyi (1876-1937), an official of the Hungarian national heritage office (Magyar Műemlékek Országos Bizottsága) led two excavations in Pécs in 1913 and 1922, during which five new funerary monuments were found (Burial Chambers Nos. III-VI, *Cella Trichora*) and four of them were excavated (No. V was not).⁹ He defined the area of the Late Antique cemetery and placed its early Christian part around the Burial Chambers I and V. His inexact vocabulary on the closeness of the Burial Chambers I, II and IV caused widespread confusion whereby these buildings in Sopianae were catacombs.¹⁰

Ejnar Dyggve (1887-1961), a Danish scholar studied the history of the Sopianae cemetery primarily from an architectural perspective. He analysed the close relationship in architectural type between the *mausolea* in Sopianae and in Salona (Dalmatia).¹¹ Relying on Henszlmann's works, he made a reconstruction of the SS

⁶ I. Henszlmann, *Pécsnek régiségei* [Antiquities of Pécs] (1873); *id.*, *Die altchristliche Grabkammer in Fünfkirchen* (1873).

⁷ In more details: G. Heidl, 'Jónás a repkény alatt' [Jonah under the Gourd Vine] (2005), 183-99.

⁸ I. Henszlmann, 'A pécsi sírkamra „cubiculum”' [The burial chamber cubiculum in Pécs] (1876), 38-9.

⁹ O. Szőnyi, *Ásatások a pécsi székesegyház környékén 1922-ben – Grabungen in der Umgebung der Pécs-er (Fünfkirchen) Domkirche im Jahre 1922* (1927).

¹⁰ G. Gosztanyi, *A pécsi ókeresztény temető* [The Early Christian Cemetery in Pécs] (1943), 20.

¹¹ E. Dyggve, R. Egger, *Der altchristliche Friedhof Marusinac* (1939); E. Dyggve, *History of Salonitan Christianity* (1951).

Peter and Paul Burial Chamber. In this way, he demonstrated that it had a two-storied structure, that is, a memorial chapel was built above the underground *cubiculum*.¹² (Figure 6)

In the 1930s, Gyula Gosztonyi (1904-1962), an architect of the Diocese of Pécs, summarized the manifold results of the excavations of the last half century and also added some more resulting from his own successful activity.¹³ His 1943 monograph analyzed the remains of the cemetery mainly from an architectural point of view.¹⁴ In it, the layout and wall structure of the burial chambers were published and compared to the arrangements of other buildings from around the Roman Empire.

The first specifically iconographic study of the burial chambers was written by Zoltán Kádár (1915-2003), a historian and art historian, in 1939.¹⁵ Although many of his interpretations have been corrected by the results of restorations or surpassed by more recent academic approaches in the area since then,¹⁶ his studies remain significant and are still inspiring up to this day.¹⁷

After the Second World War, Friedrich Gerke (1900-1966), a German scholar of Christian archaeology, who had held a visiting professorship at the Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest in 1941/42,¹⁸ published two articles on the wall paintings in Sopianae, one on the Burial Chamber with the Jar¹⁹ and another one on the SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber²⁰.

Ferenc Fülep (1919-1986), a classical archaeologist and museologist, led several excavations in Pécs between the end of the 1950s and late 1980s. He published

¹² E. Dyggve, 'Das Mausoleum in Pécs: Ein christliches Heroon aus Pannonia Inferior' (1935).

¹³ G. Gosztonyi, *A pécsi Szent Péter székesegyház eredete* [The Origin of the St Peter's Cathedral in Pécs] (1939); *id.*, 'A pécsi hétkaréjos temetői épület – Ein altchristliches Gebäude mit 7 Apsiden in Pécs' (1940); *id.*, 'A pécsi II. számú ókeresztény festett sírkamra és sírkápolna – Die bemalte altchristliche Grabkammer und Grabkapelle no. II.' (1942).

¹⁴ G. Gosztonyi, *A pécsi ókeresztény temető* [The Early Christian Cemetery in Pécs] (Pécs, 1943).

¹⁵ Z. Kádár, *Pannonia ókeresztény emlékeinek ikonográfiája* [The iconography of Early Christian Monuments in Pannonia] (1939).

¹⁶ Kádár himself modified some of his earlier statements during the heyday of his academic work in the 1960s. A good example from this period: Z. Kádár, 'Lineamenti dell'arte della Pannonia nell'epoca dell'antichità tarda e paleocristiana' (1969).

¹⁷ L. Nagy, 'Kádár Zoltán és a pannoniai provinciák ókeresztény ábrázolásainak ikonográfiája' [Zoltán Kádár and the Iconography of Early Christian Images of the Pannonian Provinces] (2014).

¹⁸ Z. K. Lengyel, 'Thomas von Bogyays Hungarologie im Exil 1945-1994' (2005), 497.

¹⁹ F. Gerke, 'Die Wandmalereien der neugefundenen Grabkammer in Pécs (Fünfkirchen)' (1952).

²⁰ F. Gerke, 'Die Wandmalereien der Petrus-Paulus-Katakombe in Pécs (Südungarn)' (1954).

the rich findings of these excavations in several articles²¹ and later, composed a monograph on the history of the Roman town and its cemetery in 1984.²²

After the sporadic excavations in the 1980s and early 1990s, at the turn of the millennium, a new wave of archaeological search started in the supposed area of the Sopianae cemetery. This period is hallmarked by the works and publications of Endre Tóth²³, Zsuzsa Katona-Győr²⁴, Gábor Kárpáti²⁵, Zolt Visy²⁶ and Olivér Gábor²⁷. In these years, Burial Chambers No. V and Nos. XIX-XXIV were excavated. The early Christian funerary monuments of Sopianae have been listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2000.²⁸ The new Cella Septichora Visitor Centre opened in

²¹ F. Füle, 'Neuere Ausgrabungen in der Cella Trichora von Pécs (Fünfkirchen)' (1959); *id.*, 'Újabb ásatások a pécsi cella trichorában' [New Excavations in the *cella trichora* in Pécs] (1960); *id.*, 'Adatok a pécsi székesegyház alatt húzódó csatorna kérdéséhez – Angaben zur Problematik des Kanals unterhalb des Domes zu Pécs (Fünfkirchen)' (1961); *id.*, 'Újabb kutatások a pécsi későrómai temetőben. Neuere Forschungen im spätrömischen Gräberfeld von Pécs (Fünfkirchen)' (1962); *id.*, 'Későrómai temető Pécs – Geisler Eta u. 8. sz. alatt' [A Late Roman Cemetery at 8 Eta Geisler Street, Pécs] (1969); *id.*, Antal Fetter, 'Neuere Forschungen in der ausgemalten frühchristlichen Grabkammer No II. von Pécs' (1969-70); *id.*, 'A pécsi ókeresztény mauzóleum ásatása' [The excavations of the Early Christian Mausoleum in Pécs] (1977); *id.*, 'A pécsi későrómai ókeresztény mauzóleum feltárásáról' [On the Excavation of the Late Roman Early Christian Mausoleum in Pécs] (1988).

²² F. Füle, *Sopianae: the history of Pécs during the Roman era* (1984).

²³ E. Tóth, 'Sopianae: a római város, mint Pécs elődje' (2001); *id.*, 'A pécsi ókeresztény sírépületek eredete és jelképei' [The Origin and Symbols of the Early Christian Funerary Buildings in Pécs] (2003); *id.*, 'A pogány és keresztény Sopianae' [The Pagan and Christian Sopianae] (2006).

²⁴ Z. Katona Győr, 'Az első keresztények a Dél-Dunántúlon az ókeresztény temetők tükrében – Sopianae' [First Christians in Southern Transdanubia in the light of Paleochristian cemeteries – Sopianae] (2000); *id.*, 'A pályázattal érintett római sírkamrák rövid ismertetése' [Brief Description of the Roman Burial Chambers Taking Part in the EU tender] (2004).

²⁵ G. Kárpáti, 'A pécsi V. számú sírkamra' [Burial Chamber No V in Pécs] (2002); *id.*, 'Contra damnationem memoriae' (2003).

²⁶ Z. Visy, 'Christianity in Pannonia' (2001); *id.*, 'Adatok Sopianae ókeresztény leletgyűjtésének értékeléséhez' [Data for the Evaluation of the Early Christian Findings in Sopianae] (2003); *id.*, 'Előzetes kutatási beszámoló a Pécs, Szent István téren, az ókeresztény temető területén folytatott régészeti kutatásokról' [Preliminary Report on the Archaeological Research in the Area of the Early Christian Cemetery at St Stephen Square, Pécs] (2007); *id.*, 'Újabb adatok a pécsi ókeresztény sír-építmények szerkezeti felépítéséhez' [Recent Data on the Structure of the Early Christian Funerary Buildings in Pécs] (2007); *id.*, 'Recent Data on the Structure of the Early Christian Buildings at Pécs' (2007); *id.* and C. Pozsárkó, I. Z. Tóth, 'Sopianae: a *cella septichora* és környéke. Beszámoló a 2005–2006. évi régészeti feltárásról' [Sopianae: the *cella septichora* and its Neighbourhood. Report on the Archaeological Excavation in 2005–2006] (2007); *id.*, 'Von Sopianae bis Fünfkirchen' (2010).

²⁷ O. Gábor, 'Sopianae ókeresztény egyháza(i)' [The Early Christian Church(es) of Sopianae] (2007); *id.*, 'A Pécsi késő antik temető épületeinek számozása' [The Numbering of the Buildings in the Late Antique cemetery of Pécs] (2007); *id.*, 'Buildings, building elements in the town of Sopianae and its late Antique cemetery' (2008); *id.*, *Sopianae késő antik (északi) temetőjének épületei és festményei* [The Buildings and Paintings of the Late Antique (Northern) Cemetery in Sopianae], PhD thesis (2008); *id.*, 'Christograms from the northern late roman cemetery of Sopianae (Pécs)' (2008); *id.*, 'Early Christian Buildings in the Northern Cemetery of Sopianae' (2014).

²⁸ T. Aknai, Z. Katona Győr (eds), *Évezredek öröksége / Historic Millenary Heritage of Pécs* (2001).

2007. These institutions guarantee the conservation and exhibition of these unique monuments. (Figure 49 and Figure 50)

In the first decade of the twenty-first century, a special iconographic interest also arose in the painted burial chambers in Sopiana. A systematic description and analysis was done by Krisztina Hudák, whose research has proved to be one of the most significant since then.²⁹ In her book, *A Fine and Private Place*,³⁰ the whole Sopiana cemetery is studied from various perspectives including archaeological, historical, art historical as well as iconographic aspects. Some of the iconographic questions have also been approached by György Heidl.³¹ Placing the images in the context of early Christian ecclesiastical life and spirituality, he interpreted them in a broader perspective of patristic literature and iconography.

In 2012, an international conference was held in Pécs to study the early Christian monuments in Sopiana *in situ* with interdisciplinary cooperation and in a broader context of time and space.³² The volume of the conference is the most recent publication on the topic which contains archaeological, epigraphic and iconographic approaches.³³ The publication of the papers will enhance the recognition of the Sopiana cemetery by reaching a wider audience.

1.2. Wittgenstein's 'Language Games': a Framework of Interpretation

²⁹ K. Hudák, 'The Chronology of the Paintings in the Saint Peter and Paul Burial Chamber of Sopiana' (2009); *id.*, 'The iconographical program of the wallpaintings' (2009); *id.*, *A kereszténység története a Kárpát-medencében 374-456 között* [The History of Christianity in the Carpathian Basin, 374-456], PhD thesis (2013); *id.*, 'Technical Observations on the Paintings in the St. Peter and Paul (No. 1) Burial Chamber in Sopiana' (2014).

³⁰ K. Hudák, L. Nagy, *A Fine and Private Place* (2009).

³¹ G. Heidl, 'Jónás a repkény alatt' [Jonah under the Gourd Vine] (2005); *id.*, 'A pécsi I. számú sírkamra Jónás-képe és Szent Jeromos Jónás-kommentárja' [The Jonah picture in Burial Chamber No I in Pécs and St Jerome's Commentary on Jonah] (2005); *id.*, 'A bűnbeesés' [The Fall] (2005); *id.*, 'Noé' [Noah] (2005); *id.*, 'Jónás jele' [The Sign of Jonah] (2005); *id.*, 'A három ifjú a tüzes kemencében' [The Three Youths in the Fiery Furnace], (2005); *id.*, 'Remarks on the Iconography in the 'Peter-Paul' (No. 1) Burial Chamber of Sopiana' (2014).

³² 'Early Christian Art: An International Conference with special regard to the early Christian cemetery in Sopiana (Pécs, Hungary)', 24-25 May, 2012.

³³ *Studia Patristica, Including Papers Presented at the Conference on 'Early Christian Iconography', Held in Pécs, Hungary*, A. Brent, M. Vinzent (eds), vol. 73 (2014).

As the proposal of this thesis is to examine the dialogue between different constructions of reality and their synthesis and transformation by means of an interactive model, the philosophical background, which the argument will be based on, is the epistemology of the late Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951). It is hallmarked by the concepts of 'language game' and 'family resemblances'. Wittgenstein articulated his theory in his *Philosophical Investigations* (PI).³⁴ In this section, a modest part of his wide-ranging philosophical thoughts will be presented in brief.³⁵

1.2.1. 'Language Games'

Part I of the *Investigations* considers largely the difficulties of language and meaning. According to Wittgenstein, *for a large class of cases—though not for all—in which we employ the word 'meaning' it can be defined thus: the meaning of a word is its use in the language* (PI 43). He uses the simile of a tool-box to enlighten the function of words.

Think of the tools in a tool-box: there is a hammer, pliers, a saw, a screw-driver, a rule, a glue-pot, glue, nails and screws. — The functions of words are as diverse as the functions of these objects. (PI 11)

The meaning and the use of a word do not exclude each other; on the contrary, they mutually presuppose each other. Words are instruments of language which can have varying uses, according to the purposes for which language may be used. According to P. F. Strawson: 'in doing philosophy, it can't be that you are ignorant of the meaning: what you want to know is the use.'³⁶

Wittgenstein explains as follows:

We can also think of the whole process of using words in as one of those games by means of which children learn their native language. I will call these games 'language-games' [Sprachspiel] and will sometimes speak of a primitive language as a language-game. And the processes of naming the stones and of repeating words after someone might also be called language-games. (PI 7)

³⁴ L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical investigations* (2009).

³⁵ As turning my attention towards Wittgenstein's philosophy, I was influenced by Allen Brent's advice and studies. (E.g. A. Brent, *Ignatius of Antioch and the Second Sophistic* (2006), 5-17).

³⁶ P. F. Strawson, 'Review of *Philosophical Investigations*' (1954), 71.

By 'language-game', Wittgenstein means: signs (e.g. sounds, ink marks, gestures), human activities (for example, greeting, calling, asking) and circumstances (e.g. meeting a friend in a crowd of people or waiting for a letter to come in the mail), in which these signs are used (as in Wittgenstein's analogy, what are normally called 'tools', such as a hammer or a ruler).³⁷ Wittgenstein claims that truth is made in the context of a 'language game' with its underlying and implicit rules of what moves could be validly made and what could not. Objectivity is the product of agreement reached within what such implicit rules allow and do not allow.

Wittgenstein also examines the connection between words and pictures. He writes: *one often chooses between words as between similar but not identical pictures; because pictures are often used instead of words, or to illustrate words.* (PI 139 (a)) In paragraphs 139-141, he speaks about picture and its application. His point of view is that the application of a picture is not determined by the single picture itself, but rather by the use of pictures generally. And he poses the question concerning a potential clash between picture and application. *Well, he says, they can clash in so far as the picture makes us expect a different use; because people in general apply this picture like this.* (PI 142)

The aim of this study on the burial chambers in Sopiana is to consider the structure of the decoration of the burial vaults and to reconstruct its meanings and significance matrix from an iconographic point of view. Due to the shortage of concrete literary sources of Sopiana, the study will mainly build on the iconography of similar funerary contexts among early Christian artefacts. It was not coincidental at all where and how the decorations were composed and images applied. The iconographic programme of funerary monuments could be regarded a special language game within which these images were used for their functions.

However, P. Fayerabend's remark should be kept in mind. He writes:

The description of the meanings of the elements of a language-game is not exhausted by pointing to the way in which we use those elements and the connection of this use with our actions and other people's. For in uttering the words and the sentences we mean something by them, we want to express our thoughts, our wishes, etc. (cf. 501). It is *our meaning it that gives*

³⁷ J. Schulte, 'The builders' language' (2004).

*sense to the sentence ... And 'meaning it' is something in the sphere of the mind. (358)*³⁸

The development of new meanings is enabled by participation in social discourses within various 'forms of life'.

1.2.2. 'Family Resemblances'

Besides the term of 'language game', Wittgenstein introduces the concept of 'family resemblances' in this part of his work: *I can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities than 'family resemblances'.* (PI 67) He claims that when we try to find a commonality in everything that we call by some particular words, we discover that there is no essential commonality, but a 'family' of commonalities, shared by some, not by all.

Wittgenstein had already used this term in his former, so called *Blue Book*. There he wrote:

*We are inclined to think that there must be something in common to all games, say, and that this common property is the justification for applying the general term 'game' to the various games; whereas games form a family the members of which have family likenesses. Some of them have the same nose, others the same eyebrows and others again the same way of walking; and these likenesses overlap. The idea of a general concept being a common property of its particular instances connects up with other primitive, too simple, ideas of the structure of language. (The Blue Book, p. 17)*³⁹

Note that Wittgenstein's own English expression was 'family likenesses' here in his *Blue Book* rather than Anscombe's translation of 'family resemblances', which has been used widely.

Haig Khatchadourian, who explained Wittgenstein's thoughts, asserts that there is no quality or set of qualities which would be common to things called by a common name (when the name is used in the same 'sense'). Instead of such a common quality or set of these, complex patterns of resemblance reveal themselves in different cases.⁴⁰ This is illustrated, for instance, by what we call 'games':

³⁸ P. Feyerabend, 'Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations' (1968) 123-4; *id.*, 'Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations' (1955).

³⁹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Preliminary studies for the Philosophical investigations. Generally known as the blue and brown books*, (1969).

⁴⁰ H. Khatchadourian, 'Common Names and "Family Resemblances"' (1958), 341.

If you look at them you will not see something that is common to all, but similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that [...] Look for example at board-games, with their multifarious relationships. Now pass to card-games; here you find many correspondences with the first group, but many common features drop out, and others appear. When we pass next to ball games, much that is common is retained, but much is lost. (PI 66)

Instead of finding characteristics common to all games, *we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and crisscrossing: sometimes over-all similarities, sometimes similarities of detail* (PI 66). These similarities Wittgenstein calls ‘family resemblances’ because *the various resemblances between members of a family: build, features, colour of eyes, gait, temperament, etc. etc. overlap and criss-cross in the same way* (PI 67).

This means that general terms are identifiable in terms of ‘family resemblances’, terms in natural languages are not exhaustively definable, and such languages have conceptual organisations that are sufficiently elastic to enable new particulars allowing for inclusion in a known scheme. The conceptual structure constituting agreement in a particular ‘form of life’ of one group is capable of absorbing the conceptual structure of another, and *vice versa* in a process of mutual transformation.

Images operate through a non-verbal logic, some of which are conceptually fundamental to agreement in a ‘language game’ and others may be used in agreement or disagreement in opinion. It is inevitable that agreement and disagreement will take place between individuals. But a disagreement is only possible between individuals who have achieved a prior agreement, an ‘agreement in a form of life’. When the discussion is between individuals about artefacts, it is also dependent on a prior agreement in which the participants share or are in the process of coming to sharing in an iconographic ‘language game’. This particular non-verbal ‘language game’ can be detected via a ‘family resemblance’ between concepts, in which the conceptual identities of the game’s participants are constituted.

This train of Wittgenstein’s thought will be used in the present argument. The similarities between the SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber in Sopianae and the catacomb paintings in Rome will be analysed. According to this empiric examination, the exact same decoration as in Sopianae cannot be found elsewhere, but a

great number of similarities can be demonstrated. The correspondences can be interpreted on the ground of a hypothetical ‘family resemblance’ of the images in a Christian funerary context.

Another thought of H. Khatchadourian about the gradation of ‘family resemblance’ will be applied, too. He writes:

But how determinate should a characteristic shared by all members of a “family” be in order that it may be said to be “something in common” to all the members? For determinateness is a matter of degrees, and is relative: what is a determinate characteristic relatively to a given characteristic may be a determinable relatively to another characteristic.⁴¹

It means that there is an analogy among the *cubicula* based on the number of the images that occur in a particular *cubiculum*. This will be demonstrated in a chart including the different occurrences of the images. This analogy is manifested in the different grades of similarities.

Wittgenstein’s ‘family resemblance’ theory will also be applied when evaluating the Christian or non-Christian identity of an archaeological finding. There are cases (for example, the Burial Chamber with the Jar in Chapter 10) where religious classification is debated because of the lack of any Christian symbol. In the terms of ‘Christian grave’ or ‘the grave of a Christian’ the concept of ‘Christian’ will be regarded as a ‘common name’, and the elements of Christian identity are connected in a ‘family resemblance’ in the Wittgensteinian sense.

All the above can lead on to the consideration of the use of such adjectives as ‘Christian’, ‘pagan’ or ‘neutral’ in general, in Late Antique art. Is that what is not Christian necessarily ‘pagan’? Or can it be ‘neutral’? Is it really *ne utrum*, neither of them? Or is it Christian in another way? Is it possible to state this about a grave in the same sense before and after Constantine? These are some of the questions which could be approached with the help of Wittgenstein’s theory of ‘common names’ and ‘family likenesses’.

1.3. New Perspectives in Late Antiquity Research

⁴¹ H. Khatchadourian. ‘Common Names and “Family Resemblances”’ (1958), 342.

The aim of this study is to add new perspectives to the current state of research. New directions have been unfolding in current literature studying Late Antique history, society, religion and art placing different emphases than previously on the phenomena of the era.⁴²

The new main approaches are concerned with:

- the complexity of religious identities and institutions;
- mutually inspiring interactions between different religious groups;
- transition from a non-Christian to a predominantly Christian society (both on macro and micro levels).

1.3.1. *The complexity of religious identities and institutions*

When the objective is to study ancient images, it is less than logical to neglect the social, cultural, intellectual and religious contexts in which those images were produced and existed. Although these contexts may be quite different from the one in which images are viewed today, their interpretation must regard their original milieu, or otherwise, it will misunderstand their *raison d'être*.⁴³ Therefore, the real question should not be how a twenty-first-century viewer understands a Late Antique image. Rather it should be approached reversed in time: How close can we get to the creator's and the contemporaneous viewers' understanding? Even if Late Antique artefacts survive fragmentarily in many cases, yet, they should be interpreted on the basis of the milieu and circumstances of their creation with reasonable probability on the possible highest level.⁴⁴ And if the subject of the study has religious characteristics, this is true for the religious milieu in increased measure.

From the vast number of definitions of religion, R. Orsi's definition seems the most suitable for the present argument, as it lays great emphasis on the visual characteristics of religion. He writes:

Religion is the practice of making the invisible visible, of concretizing the order of the universe, the nature of human life and its destiny, and the various dimensions and possibilities of human interiority itself, as these are under-

⁴² A. Brent, 'Methodological Perspectives in the Interpretation of Early Christian Artefacts' (2014).

⁴³ R. Jensen, 'Early Christian Images and Exegesis' (2007), 68.

⁴⁴ J. Engemann, *Deutung und Bedeutung frühchristlicher Bildwerke* (1997), 20.

stood in various cultures at different times, in order to render them visible and tangible, present to the senses in the circumstances of everyday life.⁴⁵

There is a tendency in current religious studies to focus primarily on the individual, on their experiences and concrete practices that make up their personal religious experience and expression, instead of looking at affiliation or organizational participation. This attitude regards religion as 'an ever-changing, multifaceted, often messy – even contradictory – amalgam of beliefs and practices.'⁴⁶ It does not necessarily overlap with the institutional religion which was attributed with foremost academic prominence. The individual's own account is not simply a subchapter in the grand narrative of some 'official' religion.

The modern Western concepts of religion and religious commitment developed after and under the influence of religious polemics and apologetics in Europe after the reformation. Thus, the concept of religion in our culture has been containing of mutually exclusive, not to say antagonistic, categories in a normative way. This kind of concept fails to describe adequately the individual's engagement to their religion in their everyday life.⁴⁷ That is why the concepts by which the individual's religion is described shall comprehend it as 'religion-as-practised' or 'lived religion', as it is worded by M. McGuire,⁴⁸ in all its complexity and dynamism.

This approach of 'lived religion' which pertains to the individual is not merely subjective. Individual religion is fundamentally social. People construct their religious worlds together; it is practised, experienced, and expressed as an intersubjective reality. The focus throughout this study will be on early Christian's artefacts, their iconological interpretation and the different shades of identity which they represent. Therefore, the concept of 'lived religion' will be apt for the present analysis as it grants a creative place for the artefacts in the intersubjective religious experience and expression.

The individual's religious practices might be formed by various cultural sources, of which a particular religion may be just one – even if an important one, a master or core identity. These resources may influence the individual's personal

⁴⁵ R. A. Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth* (2005), 73-4.

⁴⁶ M. B. McGuire, *Lived Religion* (2008), 4.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

identity, so that the individual constructs a personal identity amalgam from often diverse cultural resources, which may blend different elements and may include some sense of connection with different traditions. If the individual's religion is considered to be a 'lived' one, it means that some elements of one's religious identity dynamically come into foreground in one social context and are less emphasized in others. 'In the very process of living and experiencing their religious identities, individuals creatively adapt and change, expressing their lived religion differently in changing life-stages, relationships and cultural settings.'⁴⁹

Consequently, the individual's religion cannot be encompassed by their membership in a single religious organization. It was also true of a Late Antique person since this era was the heyday of religious pluralism. As J. Elsner asserts:

The Roman Empire in the second and early third centuries was a large, multi-cultural, and pluralist domain characterized by an extraordinary number of religions – some very local and some international – most of which were tolerated for most of the time.⁵⁰

In such a society, nobody was equated with their religious affiliation in an exclusive way. Scholars of religion use many categories to reflect accurately how people throughout history have identified themselves and organized their religious communities. But one must be aware that a social category can easily become an 'interpretive' or 'heuristic' category, whose main advantage is that as a scholarly tool it helps modern people's understanding when making comparisons. It highlights certain aspects of identity without having to explain it in full. The religious categories which were used in religious studies did not only identify truly existing traditions, but also functioned 'interpretively, including data that scholars assign to it apart from the self-understanding of religious people.'⁵¹

The two most important religious categories which will also appear in the present thesis are 'pagan' and 'Christian'. Some scholars have argued that the term 'pagan' is inappropriately used as designation for those cults and religious practices of the Greco-Roman world, which were affiliated to neither Christian nor Jewish

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 209.

⁵⁰ J. Elsner, 'Archaeologies and Agendas' (2003), 125.

⁵¹ D. Brakke, *The Gnostics* (2010), 16.

tradition.⁵² This term is interpretative indeed. On the one hand, it has been derived from Christian apologetics to label a religious culture whose study is affected by Christian stereotypes.⁵³ On the other, it makes the impression that ‘paganism’ was a unitary entity. On the contrary, ‘paganism’ never existed as a religion as A.H.M. Jones correctly asserted already in the 1960s. ‘Paganism was not so much a religion as a loosely-knit amalgam of cults, myths and philosophical beliefs of varying origins and even more varying levels of culture’.⁵⁴

The Latin word for pagan is *paganus*, which can mean both a rural dweller and a civilian. Both meanings can explain the origin of the new, religious sense. On the one hand, Christianity was chiefly an urban religion and because of its slower progress in rural areas, non-Christians were in the majority in the countryside. On the other hand, since Christians identified themselves as Christ’s soldiers, it is probable that they defined non-Christians in an inferior sense as ‘non-combatants’ or ‘civilians’.⁵⁵ Such people were outsiders; they were not fully enrolled members of the empire of God.⁵⁶ However, according to P. Brown, “pagan” was not necessarily a hate word. It was often used in a relatively neutral manner as a convenient, idiomatic term for non-Christians.⁵⁷

The word ‘pagan’ began to circulate widely only in the 370s. It was a word used in a religious sense only by Latin Christians. Therefore, the word ‘pagan’ (in this religious sense) can be used only in Christian discussions, i.e. related to Christianity.⁵⁸

The main alternative that has been proposed is ‘polytheist’, which would eliminate the concerns mentioned above. However, arguments can be made against the suitability of this term. It has also strong interpretative-heuristic rather than

⁵² A. Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire* (1991), 121-2; G. Fowden, ‘Constantine’s porphyry column’ (1991), 119.

⁵³ ‘The pagans did not know they were pagans until the Christians told them they were.’ (H. Chadwick, ‘Augustine on Pagans and Christians’ (1985), 9).

⁵⁴ A.H.M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire* (1964), 940.

⁵⁵ For discussion, see: J. J. O’Donnell, “Paganus” (1977); P. Chuvp, *A Chronicle of the Last Pagans* (1990), 7-13 (Chapter 1: ‘What is a Pagan?’); A. D. Lee, *Pagans and Christians in Late Antiquity* (2006²), 10.

⁵⁶ P. Brown, ‘Pagan’, in G. W. Bowersock, P. Brown. O. Grabar (eds), *Late Antiquity* (1999), 625. The lack of pejorative sense is attested by two fourth-century grave inscriptions of young girls. (H. Grégoire, P. Orgels, *Paganus* (1952), 383).

⁵⁷ P. Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle* (2012), 102.

⁵⁸ M. Kahlos, *Debate and dialogue* (2007), 18.

social-descriptive character. Therefore, the term 'non-Christian' will be typically used in this thesis.

The other category which will be widespread in the present study is Christian. Its application seems less problematic than that of the terms 'pagan' and 'paganism', however, some preliminary notes on it are also in order. Notwithstanding any reductionist interpretation, it should be stressed that there was no single and unitary Christianity in Late Antiquity. The fractious history of the first centuries of Christianity demonstrates that only in lengthy theological disputes and amid numerous controversies were formed what became the most cherished doctrines and dogmas of Christians.⁵⁹ The boundaries of Christian identity were not carved in stone and this flexibility showed a broad diversity in time and space.⁶⁰ There were Eastern, Western, Roman, Syrian, Egyptian, Nicæan, Arian, Pelagian, Donatist, Nestorian, Manichaean and other trends in early Christianity.⁶¹ These are some of the many shades of identity which existed simultaneously and of which some will appear on these pages.

1.3.2. *Mutually inspiring interactions*

Traditionally, the fourth century, the time after the Constantinian turn was presented as a period which was dominated largely by the conflict or even clash between Christianity and paganism. However, this interpretation has been replaced by a more inclusive and less conflict-focused attitude in the study of the period.⁶² This type of interpretation aims to provide a general interpretative framework of how a collective and slowly evolving discourse in Late Antiquity shaped the various kinds of consciousness.

Thus, it would be incorrect and reductionist to claim that in the late Roman Empire, the relationships between Jews, Christians and non-Christians ('pagans') can be exclusively described by conflicts. Though violent collisions did occur, there is significant evidence that a complex, more or less peaceful coexistence was the

⁵⁹ J. Elsner, 'Art and architecture' (1998), 746-7.

⁶⁰ R. A. Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity* (1990), 34.

⁶¹ M. Kahlos, *Debate and dialogue* (2007), 16.

⁶² P. Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle* (2012), 201.

rule rather than the exception for most of the time.⁶³ Similarly to the supposition of constant conflicts, the concept of 'isolation' is also less than suitable to characterize the connection between the groups under discussion.

This complex coexistence follows from the fact of the very proximity in which Christians and non-Christians lived as neighbours within the same cities, as members of the same society. Even the brutality of persecutions at the beginning of the fourth century can be explained by the shared existence in Roman society. P. Brown provides a plausible description of the situation from a non-Christian point of view:

They [the Christians] were ordinary townsfolk like themselves, who, for no apparent reason, held back from the universal practice of worshipping the gods. [...] Here were people like themselves. Many, in fact, were their grandparents and great grandparents.⁶⁴

Fourth-century Christians and non-Christians shared not only the dark memories of the persecutions, but also shared family memories, stories and legends, customs and traditions. They visited the same ancestral tombs, similarly participated in village pilgrimages to ancient sacred sites, and equally admired the monumental facades of their great cities. At no juncture did they become so 'Christian' that they would have left their entire past behind.⁶⁵

The model of mutual interactions has significant entailments. None of these Late Antique religious identities is independent of the others. The pervasive and creative force of 'Hellenism' becomes apparent through the commonalities between 'polytheist', Jewish and Christian traditions. The formative basis and continuous intrinsic symbiosis of 'Hellenism' can be identified in the historically real and observable forms of everyday life, culture and art.

Identities in any religious group or cult are created in a dynamic dialogue as a complex fusion of rejections of particular forms that are favoured by other people and the acceptance of other elements and motifs. J. Elsner's phrase, 'cross-cultic referentialism' can signify the phenomenon whereby Jewish, Christian, 'polytheist'

⁶³ L. V. Rutgers, 'Archaeological Evidence' (1992), 102.

⁶⁴ P. Brown, 'Late Antiquity' (2011), 24.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.

as well as inter-cult syncretistic materials and themes occurred widely in Late Antique religious contexts.⁶⁶

Their shared life and the 'cross-cultic referentialism' is particularly manifest in the area of art and iconography, where a positive interaction between Christian iconography and its non-Christian environment and past is palpable. While the creation of visual vocabulary to represent the distinct Christian doctrine was still in progress, it seems to have been necessary and also logical that such models of imagery were used unintentionally as were available and familiar to the artisans. As the earliest Christians were an integral part of the late Roman society, their artistic language naturally adapted that of the surrounding culture, either from a Jewish, or a 'polytheist' origin. The Christian message was conveyed through the existing and available media.⁶⁷

Hence, the reconstruction of 'the earliest Christian art' as an expurgation of 'pagan' symbolism to allow a full Christian meaning to advance, provides too narrow a frame for interpretation and seems to be less than adequate. It would be a more expedient model to present an iconographic context of the dialogic process, which demonstrates 'Hellenism' both as transforming and being transformed by early Christianity.

That is why the religious identification of a piece of art is quite complicated in some cases. (For example, the wall paintings of the Via Latina catacombs in Rome⁶⁸ or the Burial Chamber with the Jar in Sopianae, whose decoration will be analysed in Chapter 10.) For instance, a theme, which might have appeared 'pagan' and idolatrous to a Christian bishop, could evoke merely traditional cultural associations in the contemporaneous viewer and refer to the glorious past of Rome and her imperial splendour. A rigid insistence on a simple correspondence of iconography and meaning (e.g. a religious doctrine) cannot interpret such images sufficiently. It seems more suitable to regard these themes and their representations as

⁶⁶ J. Elsner, 'Archaeologies and Agendas' (2003), 126.

⁶⁷ R. Jensen, *Face to Face* (2004), 153.

⁶⁸ A. Ferrua, *Le pitture della nuova catacomba di Via Latina* (Vatican City, 1960); *id.*, *The Unknown Catacomb* (1991); L. von Kötzsche-Breitenbruch, *Die neue Katakomben an der Via Latina in Rom* (1976); W. Tronzo, *The Via Latina catacomb* (1986); K. Schubert, 'Jewish Influence on Earliest Christian Painting: The Via Latina Catacomb' (1992), 189-209.

the blend of 'non-Christian' and 'Christian' which were acceptable to Christians in the fourth century.⁶⁹

1.3.3. *Transition from a non-Christian to a predominantly Christian society*

A third principle present in the latest studies of Late Antiquity is a form of interpretation involving a transitional progress instead of sharp boundaries. That means that the positive and dynamic interaction between the various forms of life in late Roman Empire, which has been presented in the former section, proceeded in a subtle and self-conscious assimilation and transformation.

Over the past decades, the historiographic assessment of Late Antiquity has begun to change with scholars participating in the discussion abandoning a mutually antagonistic, apologetic approach (with regards to isolated 'pagan', Jewish, Christian culture), where 'Hellenization' was a catchword for denigrating syncretistic evidence.⁷⁰ This new attitude underlines the dynamic and gradual character of changes in history, especially changes of identity, instead of arguing for caesuras.⁷¹ It does not only mean that this comprehensive transition, which happened between the Antiquity and the Middle Ages, arched over a lengthy period, but also suggests that it proceeded through numerous stages of transformation in culture, religion and mentality, in other words, through many different shades of identity.

If the situation is approached from the perspective of 'lived religion', it can be assumed that people who became Christian in the early churches of various places (like Antioch, Rome, or Corinth) had already had pre-existing kinship systems, social class structures, languages, gender norms, everyday cultural practices and so on. Their Christianity was inoculated into the culture of their everyday lives, not to

⁶⁹ J. Elsner, 'Art and architecture' (1998), 749-51.

⁷⁰ Some examples of the many: S. Swain, M. Edwards, *Approaching Late Antiquity* (2004); P. Rousseau, E. Papoutsakis (eds), *Transformations of Late Antiquity* (2009); E. Weaverdyck, *From Pagan to Christian*, BA thesis, (2007); A. Poulter (ed.), *Transition to late antiquity, on the Danube and beyond* (2007); L. Lavan, E. Zanini, A. Sarantis (eds), *Technology in Transition A.D. 300-650* (2007); E. A. Judge, *Jerusalem and Athens: Cultural Transformation in Late Antiquity* (2010); R. W. Mathisen, D. Shanzer (eds), *Romans, Barbarians, and the Transformation of the Roman World. Cultural interaction and the creation of identity in late antiquity* (2011); G. G. Stroumsa, *The End of Sacrifice: Religious Transformations in Late Antiquity* (2012); É. Rebillard, *Transformations of religious practices in late antiquity* (2013); C. Rapp, *Holy bishops in late antiquity* (2013).

⁷¹ R. Sörries, *Spätantike und frühchristliche Kunst* (2013), 138.

mention that, by some means, they were almost certainly socialized also as Judean in order to practise the religion of the first Christians.⁷² As the transformation (or conversion) of the individual involved many aspects of their life, it was much more of an extended process on the macro level of society.

One of the main results of this tendency in academia was the exhibition called 'Transition to Christianity: Art of Late Antiquity, 3rd-7th Century AD' at the Onassis Cultural Center in New York in 2011 and the accompanying volume.⁷³ The curators of this exhibition and the contributing scholars equally regarded and interpreted Late Antiquity as a period which was characterized by 'the coexistence of innovation and originality, with continuity reaching back into a wide range of deep-seated traditions'.⁷⁴

The realization of the transition in the era consisted of differences and novelties that can be characterized by commonalities, mutuality, continuities and creativity in constructing the iconographic discourse. For example, the Christian and non-Christian images and decorations of Late Antique art were not merely static and conventional, but they participated in a discussion, in which, as in any human discussion that has a serious purpose, the concepts of both sides are generally semi-consciously changed as the discussion continues.

The Hellenistic-Roman matrix of Late Antiquity had formed and itself had been transformed in a process that continued dynamically, producing imageries that formed a visual consciousness, from which 'iconographies' (in theological terminology) or 'imageries' (in art historical) were represented on frescoes, glass, ceramics, mosaics, fabrics, architecture, sculptures, and manuscripts of Jews, Christians and 'pagans'.

All the tendencies in Late Antiquity studies, which have been briefly outlined in three points above, suggest a more cautious, inclusive and balanced attitude when studying the era, one which is attentive to the details. Therefore, the analyses of this thesis are proposed to be presented under the title and guiding principle of 'shades of identity'. This term is a true reflection of the new attitudes that have

⁷² M. McGuire, *Lived Religion* (2008), 191.

⁷³ A. Lazaridou (ed.), *Transition to Christianity* (2011).

⁷⁴ J. Elsner, 'Late Antiquity' (2011), 26.

been influenced by those tendencies. It expresses how complex the identity of the Late Antique people was and highlights how often our approaches oversimplify them. A colour comprises innumerable different shades which yet recognizably bring to the fore a single colour. Thus, my goal is to illustrate some of the many shades of Christian identity in fourth-century Pannonia. These shades are to be revealed while analysing the painted burial chambers of the Roman town of Sopianae.

Gregory of Nyssa, a bishop also from the fourth century, compared the image to a book that spoke from the wall. He wrote: *the pictures located on the walls are eloquent by their silence and offer significant testimony* (Gregory of Nyssa, *Oratio laudatoria sancti ac magni martyris Theodori*).⁷⁵ Let us now open up this 'picture book' and may the wall paintings of Sopianae's cemetery talk to us.

⁷⁵ PG 46, 737; Richard Casimir McCambly (trans.).

2. Special Characteristics of Early Christian Artefacts

The purpose of this chapter is to present some special characteristics of early Christian artefacts which should be observed in the case of an iconographic approach. These considerations will be useful later in analyzing the iconographic programs of the early Christian burial chambers in Sopianae. Four features will be demonstrated, which influence the later consequences of this study: multivalent meaning; composition and agenda; context and physical setting; target audience and social context.

2.1. Theological Background and Multivalent Meaning

If the attribute 'Christian' is used to typify an artefact, it is implied in this attribution that Christian faith and spirituality played an important role in the birth of that particular work of art and/or in its reception in history. That is why it is profitable to consider the possible connections between early Christian theology and iconography. However, it is important to assert that the correlation between early Christian artefacts and the theological teaching of the early Church is twofold. Early Christian images are neither directly subordinated to the purposes of dogmatic treatises, nor are they in direct contradiction with them.

Unfolding this 'neither-nor' nature of the relation between art and doctrine, R. Jensen suggests a significant approach.⁷⁶ She refuses the idea that posits the perspectives, audiences or theological agendas diametrically opposed. It seems really insufficient to attribute only a passive and limited role to art in the patristic age as it would have merely reflected official teachings, or even popular views about the

⁷⁶ R. Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (2000), 103.

‘Christ event’. Instead, what Jensen implies to art is an active function, regarding it as a communication tool which is directed both externally and internally.⁷⁷

Early Christian iconography proves itself to be a complex system of symbols. It ‘cannot be served up as a catalogue of images with simple definitions.’⁷⁸ This model, which takes into account the multiple character of early Christian artefacts, can be apt to the diverse thoughts and attitudes coexisting in the early church.

The most distinctive characteristic of Christianity according to S. Mitchell was that it was based on a formal commitment to beliefs about Jesus’ person.⁷⁹ However, no single and unified Christology existed in the first centuries, nor that of formal commitment or institutional unity. Thus, a single type of Christ’s representation could not have served all the needs and demands of the church either. As Th. Mathews writes: ‘By representing as many facets of his [Christ’s] person as possible they [painters, sculptors and mosaic workers] tried to encompass somehow the totality of the unimaginable mystery.’⁸⁰

H. G. Snyder also supports this view, asserting that ‘certain pictures and even combinations of pictures were favoured because of their semantic richness and the possibilities they offered for diverse interpretations.’⁸¹ The audience might have become accustomed to the ‘polyphone’ exposition of faith tradition through the different forms (whether homilies, liturgies, dogmatic writings or pictures) through which it was transmitted.⁸²

Another characteristic of early Christian artefacts is that some of its popular subjects may seem unusual choices to the modern eye (about the repertoire, see Chapter 3), while other possibly prominent biblical scenes (here, prominent is to be meant in the theological sense as used in early Christian thinking, on the one hand, but also on the basis of practice in today’s church) occur very rarely or not at all.⁸³ This characteristic of popularity also indicates that the significance of biblical narratives and theological emphases were not completely corresponding in Late Antiq-

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 66.

⁷⁹ S. Mitchell, *A History of the Later Roman Empire* (2007), 233.

⁸⁰ T. F. Mathews, *The Clash of Gods* (1993), 194.

⁸¹ H. G. Snyder, ‘Pictures in Dialogue’ (2005), 369.

⁸² R. Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (2000), 3.

⁸³ Ibid., 64.

uity. By examining the subjects that appear on early Christian artefacts, a more accurate and multifaceted picture emerges about the ways of thinking of Christians in these centuries. In general, 'both visual and literary imagery are complex and multi-valent'⁸⁴ and mutually enrich the understanding of this period of time.

2.2. Composition and Agenda

Many images in early Christian artefacts were more than mere representations. This can be stated about biblical narratives even more so, since typically, they were not excerpted scenes with the purpose of simply recalling a single story from the Scripture. The images of biblical stories and persons appear to have been selected, composed, and placed into a larger context by design. It is most likely to mean that there was a prevailing aim to assign the position of certain figures and scenes in relation to others. This planned design also indicates an interpretative function that often becomes apparent through these ways.⁸⁵

This compositional arrangement of certain images augments and enriches the significance of individual images. As R. Jensen accurately writes, 'Within a compositional group, individual images might resonate with or reinforce one another, contributing to a whole that is greater than the mere sum of its parts.'⁸⁶ This means that the meaning of any particular image surpasses both its narrative scenery and 'literal' significance, and hence becomes more symbolic or figurative.

The limited range of subjects found in early Christian artefacts, which has been mentioned in the previous subsection, points towards the fact that certain motifs were deliberately chosen and preferred, possibly because they could comply with the given context suitably. The selection and arrangement of the images might have been conducted by a definite theme or idea.⁸⁷

In addition to the frequency of certain themes in early Christian artefact, the compositions themselves also show some features which require further explana-

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁸⁵ R. Jensen, 'Early Christian Images and Exegesis' (2007), 68.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ R. Jensen, *Living water* (2011), 29-30.

tion. One of them is when an image condenses a whole narrative abandoning some elements, persons or circumstances. The representation of Noah's story can be an appropriate example. Noah is usually depicted floating in a box-like ark in early Christian artefacts, but not in the company of his wife or the animals or under a rainbow, as it might be expected based on his story in the Bible.⁸⁸

In the case of Jonah's story, the iconography concentrates on such elements of the narrative that communicate the essential message: Jonah thrown into the sea, swallowed by the sea monster, and finally, resting under the gourd. Other details of the narrative, like the sins of the Ninevites, Jonah's preaching or the conversion of the city, are omitted. The depiction of these details was not crucial to implement the aim of the images. The selection both in subject and composition might have served a symbolic purpose.⁸⁹

R. Sörries ascertains that the abbreviating method in early Christian iconography was widespread. Although this taut technique of picture formulation was developed in and for sepulchral context, it was also applied in the iconography of church decoration (e.g. in Dura Europos) and in Bible illumination.⁹⁰

There are other cases that exhibit unexpected, extra-textual features as an addition. For instance, the images in which a wand appears in the hand of Jesus in such pictures as the Multiplication of Loaves, the miracle of Cana or the raising of Lazarus.⁹¹ This wand has basically been interpreted as either *virga virtutis* (e.g. M. Dulaey⁹²), as *virga thaumaturgica* (e.g. T. Mathews⁹³), or as in close relation with the sacraments and a symbol of the Crucifixion (e.g. G. Heidl⁹⁴).

The second compositional characteristic enriches the significance of the images. It means that adding elements of meaning that are not present strictly in the

⁸⁸ *Genesis* 6:13 – 9:28.

⁸⁹ R. Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (2000), 75-6.

⁹⁰ R. Sörries, *Spätantike und frühchristliche Kunst* (2013), 71.

⁹¹ L. M. Jefferson, 'The Staff of Jesus in Early Christian Art' (2010), 221-51; *id.*, *Christ the miracle worker in early Christian art* (2014).

⁹² M. Dulaey, 'Le symbole de la baguette dans l'art paléochrétien' (1973).

⁹³ T. F. Mathews, *The Clash of Gods* (1993), 54-89.

⁹⁴ G. Heidl, *Érintés* [Touch] (2011), 171-205; *id.*, 'Early Christian imagery of the 'virga virtutis' and Ambrose's theology of Sacraments' (2013).

narrative source grants opportunity for the development of the literal reading of texts. This process demonstrates the iconographic adaptability of the narratives.⁹⁵

R. Jensen analyzes these two tendencies of picture composition, i.e. the reductive, condensing, and the expansive supplementary way. She observes that the first method 'may be an attempt to capture the essence of meaning in a simple, almost formulaic reference to a familiar narrative.'⁹⁶ This technique amplifies the referential power of the image rather than its narrative details; the symbolic level outshines the illustrative representation of the scenes.

Turning now to the whole program or composition, more support may be provided to the process of interpretation. Through the assumption that individual paintings were parts of a unified agenda rather than isolated scenes it can be discovered that what all these images might have in common is that they are all involved in a shared iconographic scheme.

For example, if an ancient visitor had entered a painted *cubiculum* in the Roman cemetery of Sopianae, he would have experienced that he was surrounded by visual images on all sides. These images try to win the visitor's attention. They face one another; they engage and augment each other. In many ways, they are influenced by one another. Each is in a dynamic conversation with its neighbours. If this conversation, this field of influence is disregarded, the isolated image would remain locked in a monologue.⁹⁷

The construction of the iconographic program consists of the process of the extraction from the broader narrative context and the juxtaposition to other scenes referring to other texts of the Scripture. The accorded placement of images to a larger visual program reveals new levels of meaning. 'Thus, while these narrative images referred to a particular biblical story on one hand, they also gained a secondary significance that becomes clear when viewing the decorative scheme as a whole.'⁹⁸

⁹⁵ R. Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (2000), 66.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ H. G. Snyder, 'Pictures in Dialogue' (2005), 350.

⁹⁸ R. Jensen, *Living water* (2011), 31.

It is useful to refer to F. Bisconti's analysis of the *Cappella Graeca's* iconographic program in the Priscilla catacomb in Rome.⁹⁹ He states that in this room 'everything seems to converge in the nucleus of the so-called Eucharistic banquet.'¹⁰⁰ (The banquet scene most probably has only a funerary character.) Other themes, like 'resurrection (Lazarus, and the phoenix), salvation (Daniel, Abraham, the three Babylonian youths, Susanna), baptism (Noah, the paralytic, Moses striking the rock), as well as iconography that is more properly and solemnly Christological (the adoration of the Magi)'¹⁰¹ are connected to this focal point. Bisconti asserts that the meanings of the individual images are in correlation with each other and they interact in a parallel way. There is a cohesive principle involving all the subjects, so that a cosmic regenerative context is created which prevails in a heterogeneous way. The principle is particularly prevalent in the vaults of the two chambers, into which the cubiculum is divided.

One of the letters of Nilus of Ancyra can be mentioned as a Late Antique Christian document bearing witness to the planned arrangement of imagery in a church.¹⁰² The letter was written to the prefect Olympiodorus in the early fifth century.¹⁰³ This letter 4.61 (and the next one, 4.62) is absent from the main corpus of Nilus' letters, so it cannot be proved that it was actually written by Nilus. However, on art-historical grounds, it can be dated in Nilus' lifetime, to the late fourth or early fifth century.¹⁰⁴

The prefect (*eparchos*) Olympiodorus was about to build a church dedicated to the holy martyrs and had evidently given Nilus an account of the decor he was proposing for his church. It was a mixture of pagan and Christian themes. Among the proposed scenes were

snare being stretched on the ground, fleeing animals such as hares, gazelles, and others, while the hunters, eager to capture them, pursue them

⁹⁹ A. C. M. Schaepman, *Explanation of the wall painting in the catacomb of Priscilla* (1929); S. Carletti, *Guide to the Catacombs of Priscilla* (2007).

¹⁰⁰ V. Ficocchi-Nicolai, F. Bisconti, D. Mazzoleni, *The Christian Catacombs of Rome* (2002²), 126.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Epistulae*, 4.61 (PG 79, 577-80).

¹⁰³ C. A. Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire* (1986), 32-4; H. Maguire, *Nectar and Illusion* (2012), 24; K. Marsengill, 'Portraits and icons in Late Antiquity' (2011), 61.

¹⁰⁴ A. Cameron, 'The Authenticity of the Letters of St Nilus of Ancyra' (1976).

*with their dogs [...] every kind of fish being caught [...] pictures of different birds and beasts, reptiles and plants.*¹⁰⁵

Such combination of Christian themes and hunting scenes with elaborate animal and bird decorations was not unusual in Christian artefacts of the fourth century. Remarkable examples are the mausoleum of Santa Constanza in Rome¹⁰⁶ (Figure 53), the mausoleum (perhaps of Constans I's [337-350]) at Centumcellae (Centcelles) in Spain¹⁰⁷ (Figure 54), or the mosaic floors of the Ancient Basilica in Huarte in Syria¹⁰⁸ (Figure 55).

In his reply, Nilus strongly suggested that no more than a cross should adorn the sanctuary as a reminder of salvation. On the side walls of the church, images from the Old and New Testament should be depicted so that the mind would not be distracted by frivolities. The latter would serve the illiterate as Nilus claimed. What Nilus wrote of the function of Old and New Testament scenes on church walls for the illiterate is echoed in what Paulinus wrote of the church he built at Nola also in the early fifth century.¹⁰⁹

Nilus' letter was not just a respond to Olympiodorus. Like many other letters of the church fathers, it was intended for wider circulation.¹¹⁰ Nilus provided general guidance on how to decorate a church and at the same time, also noted guidelines which give evidence for the existence of a considered iconographic program of images at the time.

2.3. Context and Physical Setting

As it was demonstrated in the former section, the significance of early Christian artefacts is communicated through individual compositions or complex pictorial programs. However, the significance is manifested (at least originally) in a concrete

¹⁰⁵ From the translation by C. Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire* (1986), 34.

¹⁰⁶ J. Wilpert, *Die römischen Mosaiken und Malereien der kirchlichen Bauten vom IV-XIII Jahrhundert* (1916), 1976, Table 51, pl. 1.

¹⁰⁷ L. Montaner, *Centcelles, baptisteri i celle-memoria de la primitiva esglesia-metropolitana de Tarragona* (1931); H. Schlunk, *Die Mosaikkuppel von Centcelles* (1988); T. Hauschild, A. Arbeiter, *La villa romana de Centcelles* (1993).

¹⁰⁸ P. Canivet, M. T. Canivet, *Huarte* (1987).

¹⁰⁹ *Carmen* 27.511, cf. 28.171f.; R. G. Goldschmidt, *Paulinus' Churches at Nola* (1940).

¹¹⁰ A. Cameron, 'The Authenticity of the Letters of St Nilus of Ancyra' (1976), 190.

location; artefacts cannot be alienated from their physical setting. Thus a third significant issue that needs some consideration is that of context and physical setting.

H. G. Snyder attributes particular importance to location and position in the case of wall paintings, since 'by definition [they] are anchored to a site and a context in a way that paintings on moveable media are not.'¹¹¹ According to R. Jensen, the juxtaposition and given proximity of certain images are defined by an overarching significance.¹¹² The theme of an integrated program is revealed by the character of its components. Jensen also notes that any single element can form a part with a different meaning in different compositions.¹¹³

The vast majority of early Christian artefacts functioned contextually as cemetery art. The very sporadic evidence for non-funerary works of art before Constantine renders more difficult comparison with the art in other locations (e.g. churches and baptisteries, or simple everyday contexts).¹¹⁴ Thus, the predominance of funerary findings and the particular issue of this thesis propose that the studies be restricted only to the funerary context. It is highly probable that the funerary locations, such as catacombs¹¹⁵ or burial chambers, did not have the same religious 'intensity' as the ritually more determined settings of the Christian cult, i.e. the churches and other liturgical spaces.¹¹⁶

The emotional climate of a cemetery¹¹⁷ is special. The physical environment surrounding the paintings was dark, damp and tight. The air of a burial chamber might have been stifling. The affective context can be characterized by deprivation, suffering and grief. Homer's *Odyssey* regarded Hades, the silent world of death as a 'joyless region' (*aterpea chōron*).¹¹⁸ Dwelling places of the dead are occupied by sadness and tears. For a typical visitor, they were probably associated with the loss of loved ones, family and friends and the sentiment of separation. P. Finney's portrayal seems to be right: a catacomb 'is a warren, bewildering and opaque, a silent black cunicular maze, inhospitable and intimidating – to those of us still living it is a

¹¹¹ H. G. Snyder, 'Pictures in Dialogue' (2005), 350.

¹¹² R. Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (2000), 66.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 67.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 68.

¹¹⁵ Fiocchi-Nicolai, von Hesberg, Ristow, 'Katakomben (Hypogaeum)' (2004).

¹¹⁶ J. Elsner, 'Art and architecture' (1998), 749-50.

¹¹⁷ J. Kollwitz, 'Coemeterium' (1957).

¹¹⁸ *Odyssey* 11.204-22.

reminder of human frailty and vulnerability.¹¹⁹ Consequently, conforming to the limited visibility at the funerary locations, the images of the decoration were selected in such a way that their identification would be facilitated by the recognizable iconographic features.¹²⁰

Early Christian images were present not only in a funerary context but also in a cultural and religious milieu, too. A suitable interpretation shall consider the religious environment of an image; otherwise 'it misunderstands its primary reason for being.'¹²¹ According to R. Jensen, the subjects painted on the walls of tombs or carved on marble sarcophagi obviously 'reflected to some degree Christian beliefs about death and afterlife, the nature of salvation, and the community's hopes in that regard.'¹²²

However, scholars' opinion about these 'degrees' and the proportion among the aforementioned three notions differs on a wide scale. There are different views as to which of the three had predominant influence. It seems that the views vary on the basis of their attempt to explain either the origin of 'early Christian art', or its observable characteristics in the repertoire. Six main directions of approach will be discussed in Chapter 3.

E. Goodenough's study claims that the beliefs and hopes reflected in a funerary context are not characterized by catechetical inclination and theological precision, which are however, appropriate for the *praeparatio evangelica* and present in great basilicas like the Santa Maria Maggiore. He argues that 'Christians in their death were not arguing or demonstrating, but dying and hoping and believing.'¹²³

Goodenough gives an overview of the subjects typifying this essential faith and hope, as well as the images they were represented through:

- 'hope in the great life-givers who had conquered death (Jonah, Daniel, the three Boys, and Lazarus);
- hope in the Eucharist (the multiplication of the loaves and the omnipresence of the vines and cup, the baskets of flowers, or eating and drinking);

¹¹⁹ P. Finney, *The Invisible God* (1994), 281.

¹²⁰ J. Dresken-Weiland, 'Bilder im Grab und ihre Bedeutung' (2011), 70.

¹²¹ R. Jensen, 'Early Christian Images and Exegesis' (2007), 68.

¹²² R. Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (2000), 68.

¹²³ E. Goodenough, 'Catacomb Art' (1962), 141.

- faith in the baptism (the migration scenes and perhaps Moses getting water from the rock and the ascension of Elijah);
- hope in their great champion who destroys evil, (Samson, Hercules, Moses with the dead Egyptians, Phinehas);
- belief in the power of the church, temporal and eternal (Peter and Paul with Christ, or the twelve with Christ, or the “Physician” scene).¹²⁴

The decorative elements of an early Christian tomb generally originated from a specific repertoire. The selection seems to be characterized by the suitability of certain subjects for certain contexts. This appropriateness of subjects was defined by and evolving in the community in which the iconographic compositions were created. J. Engemann draws the attention to the fact that the decoration of a tomb resonated the beliefs and hopes of the deceased and at the same time, the remaining relatives.¹²⁵ The importance of community will be studied in detail in the next subchapter.

H. G. Snyder provides a viewer-centred approach to iconographic agendas in his article about the Hypogeum on Via Dino Compagni in Rome.¹²⁶ His analysis presumes a contemporaneous visitor to the catacomb, who watching the combination of images all around, finds himself in a lively and evolving dialogue. In this dialogue, the spectator realizes that ‘the interpretive possibilities amount to more than the sum of the images taken separately.’¹²⁷ Snyder lists four causes as to why a viewer would have made multiple connections between the pictures all through a painted tomb.

1. ‘When pictures share obvious debts to an underlying narrative;
2. When pictures feature a readily discernible coincidence or contrast of theme;
3. When two or more pictures display noticeable similarity at the level of subject matter or form;
4. In cases where decorative elements – either human figures, animals, or even graphic designs – show evidence of pairing or decorative balancing.’¹²⁸

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ J. Engemann, *Deutung und Bedeutung frühchristlicher Bildwerke* (1997), 106.

¹²⁶ H. G. Snyder, ‘Pictures in Dialogue’ (2005).

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 352.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 361.

In the SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber in Sopianae, there are three panels on both sides of the vault. (Their composition will be analysed in Chapters 8 and 9 incorporating Snyder's categories.)

2.4. Target Audience and Social Context

The interpretation of early Christian iconographic programs cannot be deficient in referring to the community in which they emerged. Christians were part of society with its political and cultural dispositions. In many cases, even debates about theological questions in the early church had worldly motivations and implications. Similarly, the development of 'Christian art' came about in relation to historical events and amidst particular social circumstances.

Early Christian visual art was born in a living religious community. The central values of a community, apparent in texts, rituals, traditions, determine the manifestation and characteristics of art in the community. R. Jensen proposes, 'Christian art evolved in an integrated environment and evolved in relation to external historical pressures as well as internal theological developments.'¹²⁹

The social and ecclesiastical context of the artefacts is expressed in many ways. Theological debates, methods of scripture interpretation and practices of worship all had impacted upon them. The Christian community's influence in grave decoration is accentuated by Jensen when she writes, 'the consistency of the iconographic programs from tomb to tomb indicates that individual taste or personal whim played little role in the decoration of these places.'¹³⁰

With regard to the interpretation process, the Christian community has a significant feature, as pointed out by Jensen. It is the dichotomy of two characteristics of religious communities. On the one hand, communities show such diversity that can allow a rather broad range of interpretations. On the other hand, they are narrow enough to cohere as a sole group.¹³¹ Thus, research must find the balance between the two interpretations, basing them on certain core beliefs and on intra-

¹²⁹ R. Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (2000), 26.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 182.

religious pluralism. According to Jensen, 'fundamental continuity among these different modes of expression should be presumed about any group.'¹³²

It also seems useful to cite J. Elsner's observation, an expert of Late Antique art history. He characterizes this period as the one of radical cultural transformation.¹³³ Transformation is substantially associated with the coexistence of innovation and originality. According to Elsner, continuity in Late Antiquity reached back

[...] into a wide range of deep-seated traditions, not only Greek and Roman but also Pharaonic and Ptolemaic Egyptian, Mesopotamian and Persian, Semitic, African, and indigenous pre-Roman in the north (from Spain via Britain to Gaul, Germany, and Dacia) and also brought by "barbarian" tribes in the period of invasions that began at the end of the 2nd century.¹³⁴

This transformation is also observable in Christian artefacts. Throughout the fourth and in the early fifth century, more detailed and elegant decorating forms were gradually being developed on Christian sarcophagi and walls of underground tombs. Late Antique transformation was manifest in 'an evolution of style and taste.'¹³⁵

Studying the target audience of early Christian funerary art gives rise to the question of 'Whom were these artefacts for?'. E. Goodenough attempted to give an answer to this question in his analysis of the Roman catacomb art. He did not have the impression that 'catacomb art could have had much relation to everyday living.'¹³⁶ This art was rather for the dead, not for the living, with the intention of establishing their hopes of future life. 'The scattered paintings in the greater catacombs seem consolation and hope for the dead.'¹³⁷ According to Goodenough, the paintings in catacombs played a role in perpetuating, celebrating and confirming the faith and hope of those deceased people.

In his book on the importance and meaning of early Christian images,¹³⁸ J. Engemann provides a more balanced and feasible approach to the question of the target audience. He makes references to some of the hypotheses detailed in Chap-

¹³² *Ibid.*, 182.

¹³³ J. Elsner, 'Late Antiquity' (2011), 26.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ R. Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (2000), 25.

¹³⁶ E. Goodenough, 'Catacomb Art' (1962), 137.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ J. Engemann, *Deutung und Bedeutung frühchristlicher Bildwerke* (1997).

ter 3. Engemann suggests that according to the theory of deliverance from persecution (see Chapter 3.3), images provided consoling thoughts to the living and the hope of salvation to the departed at the same time.¹³⁹

Engemann also cites the theory of the *commendatio animae* prayer (see Chapter 3.4), which places 'paradigmatic prayers' ('*Paradigmengebete*') for salvation into the centre. In this case, the target of the prayer, and consequently of the pictures as well, seems to be God himself, to whom either the deceased, or the living turn on the former's behalf.

The possibility of this model is weakened by the fact that a supplication to God or Christ for deliverance is not evidently attested by funerary inscriptions, although similarity to inscriptions of the same period and location might be expected.¹⁴⁰ Instead, inscriptions typically wish to the departed rest, peace and *refrigerium*, or assure him of these.

Hence, relying on the absence of prayer inscriptions as an *argumentum ex silentio*, Engemann proposes that the images of the 'deliverance paradigm' and of other miracles might have expressed such beliefs (primarily amongst the living) as the salvation of those who died as Christians.¹⁴¹ Engemann also admits that there are other images, like Moses receiving the Law at Mount Sinai, Jesus' baptism, Jesus in front of Pilate, scenes from Peter's life or the '*traditio legis*' scene, which cannot be interpreted as elements of the 'deliverance paradigm,' even though they occur in funerary contexts. He presupposes that in cases of such themes, the commissioner of the tomb might have opted for a decoration with some impressive religious images.¹⁴²

The main benefit of Engemann's approach lies in its complex nature. It is noteworthy how this study considers the possible persons whom the early Christian artefacts might have been addressed to and attempts to find a non-exclusive model for explanation. Presupposing a complex matrix of effects as the social context of early Christian artefacts seems viable. It is not unreasonable to assume that artists created their works according to the wishes and purposes of their commissioners,

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 106-7.

¹⁴⁰ G. Pfohl, 'Grabinschrift (griechisch)' (1983); C. Pietri, 'Grabinschrift (lateinisch)' (1983).

¹⁴¹ J. Engemann, *Deutung und Bedeutung frühchristlicher Bildwerke* (1997), 107.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

who had ordered them for their family graves. The decoration reflected their faith, which was shared with other family members, lived in the community of the church, and focussed on God and eternal life.

3. Six Hypotheses on the Repertoire of Early Christian Images

When studying the biblical scenes represented in early Christian artefacts, it soon becomes obvious that certain episodes in the catacomb paintings occur with a significant frequency.¹⁴³ From a contemporary point of view, some of the more frequent subjects may seem to be the result of a peculiar selection, whereas other possibly more prominent biblical scenes appear to be absent.¹⁴⁴ Another phenomenon is that Old Testament subjects occur approximately four times more often than New Testament themes in the Christian artefacts between the second and fourth centuries.¹⁴⁵ It also seems less logical that early Christians did not favour specifically Christian themes on their artefacts. There are different theories in current literature attempting to explain the observable peculiarity of repertoire and the predominance of Old Testament scenes in it.¹⁴⁶ The subsequent section presents six theories, which is based on the list and order suggested by R. Jensen, but expanded and presented on a broader scale. Then following the presentation of these hypotheses, I try to balance their significance showing the strengths and weaknesses of each in the same order used previously.

¹⁴³ Jutta Dresken-Weiland lists the ten most frequent themes of early Christian funerary art. (In the brackets there are the numbers of occurrences both on sarcophagi and in wall paintings). 1. Jonah in Rest (191), 2. Multiplication of the Loaves (180), 3. The Rising of Lazarus (172), 4. Daniel in the Lions' Den (172), 5. Healing of the Blind (138), 6. Jesus' Birth / Adoration of the Magi (135), 7. Jonah Cast into the Sea / Devoured (130), 8. Abraham's Sacrifice (117), 9. Moses Striking the Rock (108), 10. Peter Striking the Rock (99) (J. Dresken-Weiland, *Bild, Grab und Wort* (2010), 19).

¹⁴⁴ R. Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (2000), 64.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 68.

¹⁴⁶ A good summary of the different explanations is available in the book *Understanding Early Christian Art* by Robin M. Jensen (pp. 69-75).

3.1. Theory of Christian Artefacts' Dependence on Jewish Artefacts

There is a tendency among scholars studying early Christian artefacts to presume that its origins can be found in the art of Judaism. This theory provides the theoretical background for the hypothesis of a lost illuminated Jewish manuscript of the Bible, so it seems appropriate to first outline this theory in brief through the citation of some of its representatives.

One of the first scholars who claimed that early Christian artefacts were influenced by Jewish artefacts was Josef Strzygowsky.¹⁴⁷ E. Goodenough is one of the most prominent figures who represent this approach. His article 'Catacomb Art',¹⁴⁸ presents and analyzes the wall paintings of the Via Latina catacomb, which was freshly discovered at the time. He supposes that the person designing the paintings at the Via Latina catacomb might have used an illustrated Septuagint whose images would already have provided an allegorized interpretation of the biblical text. In the article, he proposes the hypothesis that 'Christian symbolism in art was rising out of a reinterpretation of Jewish and pagan symbolism'.¹⁴⁹ Goodenough's statement assumes that 'Christian symbolism' in art is already seen as a distinct phenomenon because of his chosen phrase 'rising out of', which seems to suggest that it is already there and only needs to 'rise out', to present itself on its own right. He also attains that Jewish art had appeared 'before the final break between Jews and Christians, for it seems to have come over to Christians as an obvious part of their Jewish heritage, presumably in their Septuagint Bibles'.¹⁵⁰

Subsequently, Goodenough explicates this process in detail. First, the Jews had combined pagan and biblical figures into a common symbolism, which was represented in art. He does not exclude the fact that there were Christians who borrowed directly from pagan art, but the method how to use Old Testament and pagan figures together to express religious contents had already existed in Judaism. According to him, 'Christian art' followed the same pattern as the Jewish had done

¹⁴⁷ *Orient oder Rom* (1902).

¹⁴⁸ E. Goodenough, 'Catacomb Art' (1962).

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 138.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 139.

before, when Christian piety applied symbols with its new and proper interpretations.

C. Kraeling formulated a similar view in his *Final Report on the Dura Baptistry*, writing in 1967: 'The case that can be made for the priority of Jewish representational art and the Christian dependence upon it seems most impressive.'¹⁵¹

Another decided and more recent supporter of this hypothesis of Jewish influence on early Christian artefacts is H. Kessler. He highlights the importance of this model calling it an 'axiom', summarizing it like this: 'Just as Hebrew Scripture had preceded the New Testament and provided a basis for it, Jewish art was necessarily a source of Christian iconography and served as its foundation.'¹⁵²

There have been other scholars in the last decades who not mitigating the special relationship between Jews and Christians have tried to place Jewish and early Christian artefacts into the broader frame of Late Antiquity. Their common aim is to provide a more nuanced picture of the complex relations of these religious groups.

L. V. Rutgers studied the relationship among Jews, Christians, and pagans in the society of the later Roman Empire. According to him, it would be inaccurate to claim that these groups related to each other exclusively in conflicts. He also opposes the use of the concept of 'isolation', since he finds it to be defined in an insufficient and reductionist way. He seems to be right when he asserts that despite of occurring violent clashes, the relationship between Jews, Christians, and pagans was complex. His description of this period can be agreed with. 'There is considerable evidence that, for most of the time, a more or less peaceful coexistence was the rule rather than the exception.'¹⁵³

Rutgers also makes some remarks on the similarities between the origins of Jewish and early Christian artefacts and he adds the Mithraic to them as well. He states that they were all sourced in the same Roman-pagan artistic traditions and

¹⁵¹ C. Kraeling, *The Excavations at Dura-Europos*, 8/2: *The Christian Building* (1967), 216. See also, *id.*, *The Excavations at Dura-Europos*, 8/1: *The Synagogue* (1956), 398-402.

¹⁵² H. Kessler, 'The Sepphoris mosaic and Christian art' (2000), quote on p. 65.

¹⁵³ Leonard V. Rutgers, 'Archaeological Evidence' (1992), 102.

‘into the fourth century, they drew on the same repertoire of Graeco-Roman prototypes.’¹⁵⁴

When J. Elsner analyses the religious situation of the Roman Empire in the second and early third centuries,¹⁵⁵ he states that it was diverse, multi-cultural and pluralist. Among the great number of religions, some were very local and some had international importance, but most of them were tolerated for most of the time. In Elsner’s opinion, the development of both Jewish and Christian art was a typical process under these circumstances. In his model, Jewish and Christian art are paralleled and connected to the art of the Mithraic or Isiac cults.¹⁵⁶ He denies the independence of these religious arts from the others. On the contrary, he asserts: ‘the iconographies and visual strategies of any one cult are a complex mixture of structural rejections of the particular forms favoured by the others and the borrowing of motifs.’¹⁵⁷

3.2. The Theory of the Lost Illuminated Manuscript of the Bible

On the basis of his hypothesis presented in the previous section, Goodenough assumes that the artist or master of the Via Latina catacomb ‘had a book of Jewish paintings from which he could select the ones he wanted’.¹⁵⁸ And later on he adds:

I suspect that the man designing the paintings at Via Latina had an illustrated Septuagint, or selections from the Septuagint, whose paintings gave already an allegorized interpretation to the text.¹⁵⁹

He asserts that perhaps Christians saw synagogues from the first centuries of the period of Imperial Rome that were decorated with mosaics and wall paintings and they followed these prototypes. To explain the reappearance of such decora-

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 106.

¹⁵⁵ J. Elsner, ‘Archaeologies and Agendas’ (2003), 114-28.

¹⁵⁶ The ‘infant Moses in the bulrushes’ scene has been interpreted as a complicated transformation of the Osiris–Isis–Horus pattern. (E. Leach, ‘Why Did Moses Have a Sister?’ (1983), 46-8).

¹⁵⁷ J. Elsner, ‘Archaeologies and Agendas’ (2003), 126.

¹⁵⁸ E. Goodenough, ‘Catacomb Art’ (1962), 138.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 139.

tions at remote locations like Dura Europos, he presupposes a circulation of some sort of manuscripts in viable form.¹⁶⁰

K. Weitzmann following this thought argues that 'early Christian art' was the direct heir of a Jewish tradition of Antioch or Alexandria in biblical illumination.¹⁶¹ He suggested that the middle-Byzantine Octateuchs recalled a Late Antique Jewish pictorial source, and that this same source was the model for the third-century wall paintings in the Dura Europos synagogue.¹⁶² He extended his theory to other pictorial representations of the Old Testament, some of which display rabbinical details, while others contain elements borrowed from the writings of Josephus Flavius. He also supposes the existence of an illustrated and now lost manuscript of the Septuagint.¹⁶³ Other scholars took over Weitzmann's belief in the existence of Late Antique Jewish illuminated manuscripts and further developed his theory.¹⁶⁴ The cycles studied in this context were for the most part those in the catacomb at Via Latina, the mosaics in the basilica of S. Maria Maggiore, the Vienna Genesis and the Ashburnham Pentateuch.

3.3. The Theory of Deliverance from Persecution

There is another, much more accepted theory explaining the peculiarities of the biblical repertoire of early Christian artefacts. This approach is more general and asserts that the scenes were selected because they could represent God's deliverance from danger, especially from persecution and death. This explanation suggests that Christians viewing the depictions of these stories found security and peace in moments of threat (like Noah in the flood, Isaac almost becoming a sacrifice, Jonah in the sea, Daniel in the lions' den, Susannah against the Elders, the three young

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 139.

¹⁶¹ H. Gerstinger, H. E. Killy, 'Buchmalerei' (1954).

¹⁶² K. Weitzmann, 'The Illustration of the Septuagint' (1971), 73-5.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 45-75; K. Weitzmann, H. Kessler, *The Frescoes of the Dura Synagogue and Christian Art*, (1990). This hypothesis was also adapted by Kurt Schubert, 'Jewish Influence on Earliest Christian Paintings' (1992).

¹⁶⁴ E.g., C. Roth, 'Jewish Antecedents of Christian Art' (1953); C. Nordström, 'Some Jewish Legends in Byzantine Art' (1955-57), 502-8; H. L. Hempel, 'Zum Problem der Anfänge der alttestamentliche Illustration' (1957) and "Zum Problem der Anfänge: Ergänzung" (1961); O. Pächt, 'Ephraimillustration, Haggadah und Wiener Genesis' (1959).

men in the fiery furnace) and, in some scenes, even paradisiacal hope (Jonah at rest, Adam and Eve).¹⁶⁵

The story of Jonah can also be understood more clearly in relation to a common underlying theme that is the one of deliverance and redemption through divine power.¹⁶⁶ It seems truly purposeful that the ordeal and deliverance of the prophet Jonah is the story most frequently represented. According to the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus himself compared the three days the prophet Jonah spent in the belly of the fish to the three days the Son of Man would be in the tomb.¹⁶⁷ Thus the Jonah story taking the form of a brief narrative cycle could easily become a promise of resurrection and eternal life. This theme is highlighted even more by that episode in the Jonah cycle where the prophet, at the end, comes to a peaceful and idyllic rest under the gourd tree, which episode is not derived straightforwardly from the biblical text.¹⁶⁸ It is in form related to the depiction of Endymion¹⁶⁹ and Selene (the Moon Goddess), just as the *ketos* with hoofed horses is to the Poseidon myth.¹⁷⁰

P. Finney develops the theory of deliverance further by elaborating on its theological dimension. According to him, these biblical stories are primarily 'the *tekmeria theou*, the tokens of God's works and deeds, his saving intervention on behalf of his people.'¹⁷¹ He proposes that these depictions are indirect signs, that is they do not present directly what they purport to represent. Finney says that they were to represent God's '*erga*' (works) which were 'personified in certain key figures who had been the beneficiaries and recipients of God's deeds'.¹⁷² The images can also be taken as '*semeia*' (signs), signs of divine intervention. Finney attributes a clearly salvational or soteriological content to them.¹⁷³ According to him, they

¹⁶⁵ G. Snyder, *Ante Pacem* (1985), 55.

¹⁶⁶ E. Kitzinger, 'Christian Imagery' (1980), 142.

¹⁶⁷ *For just as Jonah was for three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so for three days and three nights the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth. (Matthew 12:40)*

¹⁶⁸ E. Kitzinger, 'Christian Imagery' (1980), 142.

¹⁶⁹ M. Lawrence, 'Three Pagan Themes' (1961); G. Snyder, *Ante Pacem* (1985), 46-7; R. Jensen, 'Early Christian Images and Exegesis' (2007), 72.

¹⁷⁰ G. Snyder, *Ante Pacem* (1985), 90-5; E. Dassmann, J. Engemann, K. Hoheisel, 'Art. Jonas B.' (1998); Danilo Mazzoleni, 'Giona', in F. Bisconti (ed.), *Temi di iconografia paleocristiana* (2000), 191-3; D. L. Balch, 'From Endymion in Roman Domus to Jonah in Christian Catacombs' (2008).

¹⁷¹ P. Finney, *The Invisible God* (1994), 281.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

¹⁷³ J. Spier also states that 'on the most immediate level, certain biblical images served as allusions to personal salvation'. (J. Spier, 'The earliest Christian art' (2007), 8).

‘served as reminders of God’s saving action on behalf of certain representative figures within Israelite and early Christian myth’.¹⁷⁴

After presenting the main elements of the deliverance theory, R. Jensen provides some disagreement to this approach. She composes her reservations into three points.¹⁷⁵ First, she queries the presumption that most of the scenes in the early Christian repertoire are understandable by one single overarching motif that is the wish for being delivered from immediate peril. According to her, this theory is based on the historically problematic argument that persecution in the early centuries was widespread in the Roman Empire. Jensen admits that Christians were constantly vulnerable before Constantine, but she asserts that they, in general, were likely to live in harmony with the other members of Roman society (apart from brief periods of persecution).

In her second exception, she opposes this theory for its elevation of this-worldly concerns over a next-worldly focus. According to Jensen, the latter might be more appropriate for the funerary context of this imagery. She finds it illogical that this hypothesis seems to state that ‘the iconographic programs are not distinctly sepulchral, nor was their context particularly significant for the choice or interpretation of their decor’.¹⁷⁶

In the third point of her refusal, Jensen demonstrates the deliverance theory as imperfect, as it claims that ‘iconography functions on the symbolic level as much as (or more than) on the illustrative or literal levels’.¹⁷⁷ The scenes from the Scriptures provide a source for the iconography. But the figures from the story can transcend the narrative and become symbols. In this way, they are the symbols (or ‘*se-meia*’ as Finney would say) of God’s steadfast protection. However, I would like to complement Jensen’s argument with another of her considerations, which was cited at the end of the former section.¹⁷⁸ These scenes can also be interpreted in a broader Christian frame alluding to the wide range of elements and contents of Christian faith and life.

¹⁷⁴ P. Finney, *The Invisible God* (1994), 281.

¹⁷⁵ R. Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (2000), 75.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁸ R. Jensen, *Living Water* (2011), 10.

3.4. The Theory of the *commendatio animae*

The next theory explaining the frequency of certain motifs in early Christian iconography (and of Old Testament themes in early Christian artefacts generally) combines the main features of the two former ones. It takes over the presumption of Jewish origin from the theory of a lost illuminated manuscript, but does not regard Jewish sources as artistic prototypes, but liturgical texts. On the other hand, it also uses the argument from the theory of deliverance in that the main theme of early Christian imagery is the aspiration for liberation when facing horrifying peril.

The issue has been debated since the end of the nineteenth century.¹⁷⁹ This approach is based on the supposition of an early Christian prayer offered for the deceased. The hypothetical prayer would call upon God for help and salvation and would cite the precedence of those others whom God had delivered in former times, including Enoch, Elijah, Noah, Abraham, Job, Isaac, Lot, Moses, Daniel, the three youths in the fiery furnace, Susannah, David, Peter, Paul, and Thecla.¹⁸⁰ P. Finney calls these individuals 'paradigmatic figures' among whom correlation is made by the fact that they were all freed from death and oppression.¹⁸¹ That is why they created 'the earliest cycle of Christian salvation images', selected and formulated for 'petitionary paradigms',¹⁸² as stated by Finney, too.

This early Christian prayer is also referred to as a text of the funerary liturgies and called '*commendatio animae*' (commendation of the soul).¹⁸³ This plea for the dead similarly invokes the deliverance of biblical figures. Each line begins, *Libera, Domine, animam eius, sicut liberasti* (deliver, Lord, his soul, just as you delivered...) and is followed by references to the individuals mentioned before.¹⁸⁴ Ac-

¹⁷⁹ Scholarship on this subject was started by Edmond le Blant's two pieces of work, *Le sarcophages chrétiens de la Gaule* (1886) and *Étude sur le sarcophages chrétiens de la ville d'Arles* (1878). Other occurrences of this theory: D. Kaufmann, 'Sens et origine des symboles tumulaires de l'Ancien-Testament dans l'art chrétien primitif' (1887); D. Kaufmann, 'Sens et origine des symboles tumulaires de l'Ancien-Testament dans l'art chrétien primitif. Suite' (1887); K. Michel, *Gebet und Bild in frühchristlicher Zeit* (1902); V. Schultze, *Grundriss der christlichen Archäologie* (1919); C. R. Morey, *Medieval Art* (1942), 42; A. Stuber, *Refrigerium Interim* (1957); C. Brown Tkacz, *The Key to the Brescia Casket* (2002).

¹⁸⁰ R. Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (2000), 71.

¹⁸¹ P. Finney, *The Invisible God* (1994), 283.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*; J. Spier, 'The earliest Christian art' (2007), 9.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

According to Spier, both Christians and Jews used prayers for salvation invoking similar episodes from the Bible in which God's salvation was manifest. Spier states that 'Jewish examples of this sort of prayer were already in existence, notably the *zikronot* (remembrances) recited (then and now) at the New Year'.¹⁸⁵ In support of the above statement, he cites a particular part of the Babylonian Talmud,¹⁸⁶ which is like a litany of God's great deeds in Israel's history.

The only existing physical evidence confirming this theory is the so called Podgoritza plate or cup.¹⁸⁷ (Figure 56) Its uniqueness gives it an exceptional importance among those archaeological findings which provide a better understanding of early Christian iconography. The plate is a shallow glass dish. It is dated to the fourth century.¹⁸⁸ The plate was found near the site of Doclea (Duklja) at Podgorica (Montenegro) around 1870 and is now in the collection of Hermitage in Saint Petersburg.

The central medallion of the decoration shows Abraham sacrificing Isaac. (Figure 57) Around the perimeter are scenes in frieze-style (reading clockwise): Jonah, Adam and Eve, the raising of Lazarus, Peter striking a tree (not a rock),¹⁸⁹ Daniel and the lions, Susanna. (Figure 58) These images of biblical figures are well-known from the catacomb paintings and sarcophagus carvings.

The engraved inscriptions running around the edge evoke the names of the depicted figures and their divine liberation. The Latin inscriptions on the plate are written by two hands. These were distinguished by E. Le Blant as a good majuscule and a worse minuscule, which is from a much later period.¹⁹⁰ It is highly probable that the inscriptions were not done by a native Latin speaker.¹⁹¹ The inscrip- tor, who is supposed to have worked later, added the inscription about Peter and the word

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

¹⁸⁶ Ta'anith 2.1 (15a), Mishnah; translated by J. Rabbinowitz

¹⁸⁷ The State Hermitage Museum (St. Petersburg), inv. no W. 73. P. Levi, 'The Podgoritza Cup' (1963); A. V. Bank, *Byzantine Art in the Collections of the Soviet Museums* (1985) plates 26-29; P. Finney, *The Invisible God* (1994), 284; D. Cartlidge, J. Elliott, *Art and Christian Apocrypha* (2001), 163-4; C. Brown Tkacz, *The Key to the Brescia Casket* (2002), 124-26; J. Spier, 'The earliest Christian art' (2007), 9-10; E. Ferguson, 'Jonah in early Christian art' (2012), 344; R. Sörries, *Spätantike und frühchristliche Kunst* (2013), 285; L. Møskeland Fuchs, 'Recognizing the Resurrected Jesus' (2013), 46, note 5.

¹⁸⁸ P. Finney, *The Invisible God* (1994), 284; J. Spier, 'The earliest Christian art' (2007), 9.

¹⁸⁹ This scene is labelled: *Petrus virga perq/uouset/fontis cipe/runt*.

¹⁹⁰ E. Le Blant, *Étude sur les sarcophages chrétiens de la ville d'Arles* (1878), table 35.

¹⁹¹ P. Levi, 'The Podgoritza Cup' (1963), 60.

resuscitat to the original inscription of Christ and Lazarus. However, P. Levi is not entirely convinced that the two hands would be different.¹⁹²

Running round the outer edge of the plate, the accompanying inscription (beginning with Jonah) reads as follows:

DIVNAN DE VENT/RE QVETI LIBERATUS EST
ABRAM ETET EV/AM
DOMNVS/LAIARVM/resuscit/at
Petrus uirga perq/uosset/fontis cipe/runt quore/re
DANIEL DE LACO/LEONIS
TRIS PVERI DE ECNE/CAMI
SVSANA/DE FALSO CRI/MINE¹⁹³

Jonah is freed from the stomach of the sea monster,
Abraham and Eve,
the Lord resurrected Lazarus
Peter's staff ... [?],
Daniel from the lion's den,
the three youths from the fire of the furnace,
Susanna from a false crime.

According to J. Spier, the exceptional occurrence of explanatory inscriptions next to the images explicitly shows a connection between the images and the text of a contemporary prayer.¹⁹⁴ R. Sörries also states that the scenes and the inscriptions attached to them on the plate evoke the formulation of the so-called 'deliverance prayers'.¹⁹⁵

A similar item is the St. Ursula bowl,¹⁹⁶ found in the cemetery of Ursulagartenstraße in Cologne in 1866. (Figure 59) The grievously damaged gilded-glass plaque was reconstructed from more than 100 small pieces. The central part is almost entirely missing. The object might be produced in Rome in the second half of the fourth century.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹² *Ibid.* 58.

¹⁹³ *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, vol. 3: *Orientis et Illyrici Latinarum supplementum*, pars 1, fasc. 3 (1893), 10190; *Inscriptiones Latinae Christianae Veteres* (1925-1970), 2426.

¹⁹⁴ J. Spier, 'The earliest Christian art' (2007), 10.

¹⁹⁵ R. Sörries, *Spätantike und frühchristliche Kunst* (2013), 285.

¹⁹⁶ British Museum Reg. no. BEP S 317. R. Garrucci, *Storia della arte cristiana nei prima otto secoli della chiesa*, vol. 3 (1876), III-13, pl. 169.1.

¹⁹⁷ D. Howells, *A Catalogue of the Late Antique Gold Glass in the British Museum* (2015), 101-2.

The outer perimeter of the bowl is divided into eight panels radiating from the ruined centre. The first two panels depict the sory of Jonah and the *ketos*. In the next image, there is Daniel in the lions' den. Daniel is in an *orante* position between four lions. He wears a tunic with a girdle (similarly to his depiction in the Early Christian Mausoleum in Sopiana, cf. Figure 43). The fourth panel shows the Three Youths in the Fiery Furnace (for their iconography, see Chapter 8.2). The three naked figures are also in their typical *orante* position, standing behind a masonry wall and among flames, which represent the fiery furnace. The next two images are abraded so much so that their identification is far from obvious. The seventh image is the Healing of the Paralytic, while the last panel is supposed to depict Moses striking the rock.

One of the difficulties with the use of the Podgoritza plate and also the St Ursula bowl as a general key to unlock the early Christian iconography is that their purpose is not demonstrated clearly. The question, how representative they are, cannot be answered. The theory of the deliverance from persecution and the theory of the *commendatio animae* prayer seem to be quite plausible explanations because they rely on the funerary context of the images represented in wall paintings of graves or on sarcophagi. But since the context of the Podgoritza plate is unknown, it cannot be taken for granted that it was used in a cemetery or its *Sitz im Leben* was necessarily connected to funerals or commemoration of the dead. For instance, the two depicted scenes from the New Testament, i.e. the rising of Lazarus and Peter striking the water, could be connected even to a baptismal context as well. No matter how unique this plate is, caution must be taken in its interpretation and in its recognition as firm evidence in academic arguments. Even if the *Sitz im Leben* was the commemoration of the dead or baptism, it is difficult to see in the plate an example for a widespread or even universal representation.

3.5. The Theory of Scriptural Typologies

The predominant majority of the themes in early Christian artefacts originates in the Bible. As these themes are connected by references to the biblical motifs, it

seems reasonable that they provide an exegesis on them as well. The exegetical function of early Christian artefacts was examined in the former section on narratives of biblical stories (Chapter 2.2). It was asserted there that the regular oral exegesis heard by the faithful through homilies¹⁹⁸ and catecheses¹⁹⁹ created a stable basis (even for the illiterates) to be familiar with biblical stories and to allocate them to the right place in the ideological scheme of their religion.

It was also assumed before that the visual representations of stories from the Scriptures probably functioned as visual rather than verbal typologies and allegories, which two tendencies chiefly characterized the Christian exegesis in the third and fourth centuries.²⁰⁰ However, all of this does not explain the fact properly that the Old Testament scenes by far outnumber those of the New Testament, especially in view of the fact that it is quite different to use these texts in homilies or in other written documents of the same period.

3.6. The Theory of Sacramental Life

This theory interprets the early Christian imagery principally as representation of the sacramental life of the Church of the same period. In the focus of this understanding, are baptism and the Eucharist as the two main sacraments of the early Church. This interpretation also has a long tradition among scholars.²⁰¹ R. Jensen prefers to utilize this method of interpretation in her studies, too.²⁰² This view is

¹⁹⁸ M. Sachot, 'Homilie' (1994).

¹⁹⁹ O. Pasquato, H. Brakmann, 'Katechese (Katechismus)' (2004).

²⁰⁰ J. C. Joosen, J. H. Waszink, 'Allegorese' (1950); U. Utro, 'Allegoria', in F. Bisconti (ed.), *Temi di iconografia paleocristiana* (2000), 103-4.

²⁰¹ For example, the designation of 'Chapels of the Sacraments' at the Catacomb of Callistus seems to have been first used by Giuseppe Marchi as 'cappelle dei sacramenti' (*Monumenti delle arte cristiane primitive* (1844), 161-3). Later, Joseph Wilpert continued to use this terminology as 'Sakramentskapellen' (*Die Malereien der Katakomben Roms* (1903), 152). In modern studies, the term is more commonly used as 'cubicoli dei sacramenti', for greater accuracy (see, M. Braconi, 'Le cappelle dei Sacramenti e Joseph Wilpert' (2009), 80).

²⁰² Over some parts of her often cited book *Understanding Early Christian Art*, she dedicated two monographs for early Christian baptismal imagery: *Living Water* (2011) and *Baptismal Imagery in Early Christianity* (2012).

more cooperative than the former theories. Its supporters do not use it exclusively, but much rather for the enrichment of the field of interpretation.²⁰³

The theoretical background of this theory is given by a symbolist approach, which recognizes the multi-layered character of artistic symbols in early Christian images. The nature of the symbols itself suggests the omission of restricted or mutually exclusive explanations. This approach is also related to the theory prioritizing the contemporary exegetical methods like allegory and typology, because it also highlights the existence and importance of deeper levels of meaning under the literal sense on the surface. As R. Jensen claims:

Interpretation of many other images as either baptismal or eucharistic relies on a receptive sensitivity to symbolism supported by the evidence of allegorical or figurative interpretations by early Christian writers.²⁰⁴

According to this approach, early Christian images employed the same interpretive methods that were present in homilies, scripture commentaries, treatises and liturgical texts of the period. These methods can be transferred over to the interpretation of visual images, since the images were to signify more than mere illustrations of biblical stories. The stories from the Bible to which the pictures refer can be attributed with sacramental significance. Similarly, the visual images also hold sacramental interpretation by showing the sacraments as part of the divine economy.²⁰⁵

3.7. Reflections

3.7.1. *The theory of Christian artefacts' dependence on Jewish artefacts*

The relationship between Jewish and Christian artefacts continues to be one of the open issues of contemporary studies of the field.²⁰⁶ Although it is undeniable that Christians built on Jewish art, it is disputed amongst scholars today to what extent this was the case and for how long Christians had a more or less Jewish identity,

²⁰³ R. Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (2000), 80. 88-9.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 85.

²⁰⁵ R. Jensen, *Living water* (2011), 34.

²⁰⁶ R. Sörries, *Spätantike und frühchristliche Kunst* (2013), 29.

which naturally influenced the development of their own art tradition. Since the relation between Jewish and early Christian artefacts concerns the scope of this thesis only indirectly, all the arguments of this immense field cannot be enumerated and analysed here.

The fundamental problem with this approach is that it assumes Christianity to be uncontaminated by Hellenistic imagery that can only imbibe that imagery via a contaminated Judaism. But if one admits a complex identity of Christianity, where individuals, people, families, communities or branches were to some extent more or less influenced by Hellenistic imagery, too (not only by Rabbinic Judaism that was probably later, after 200 AD), then the relationship cannot be simply one from a not less complex Judaism to a simplistically understood Christianity. Instead, there might have been a fundamental discourse shared between individuals and groups of more or less Hellenistic, Jewish and Christian backgrounds in Late Antiquity, in which disagreements arise within a formal framework of meaning.

For example, it has been argued that the depiction of the crucified Christ in *Galatians* 3:1 depends on the images of suffering gods and other mythical figures whose images were widespread in the decorated houses of Pompeii and Herculaneum.²⁰⁷

Another problem with this kind of interpretation is the *polis*- or cult-oriented understanding of Judaism, Christianity, Mithraism and alike. As indicated in Chapter 1.3, new historiographical approaches are critical of it and favour a more non-denominational understanding of religious identity and the approach of 'lived religion'.

Although a more complex and shaded attitude towards the religious interactions in Late Antiquity has been developed, which also provides a better understanding of the connections between Jewish and early Christian visual art, there are still more questions than answers in this area. Such questions, which have not yet been answered satisfactorily, are: What was the attitude of Late Antique Judaism to the prohibition of images? How much did this attitude influence Christians' position

²⁰⁷ David L. Balch, 'Paul's portrait of Christ crucified (Gal. 3:1)' (2003); David L. Balch, 'The Suffering of Isis/Io and Paul's Portrait of Christ Crucified' (2003); A. C. Niang, 'Seeing Jesus Christ crucified in Galatians 3:1 under watchful imperial eyes' (2012).

on the issue? If it is true that Christians were Jews during the first decades after Jesus' death (or even until the second Jewish war), how long was the period of estrangement between Jews and Christians and what was it like in the area of producing work of art?²⁰⁸

3.7.2. *The theory of the lost illuminated manuscript of the Bible*

The hypothesis of a lost manuscript does not seem entirely implausible, but it is highly problematic because of the absence of the evidence of such a manuscript tradition. In 1966, this theory was questioned by H. Strauss who assumed a literary tradition explaining the presence of rabbinical elements in early Christian artefacts instead of a transfer of iconographic elements.²⁰⁹ Later, J. Gutmann denoted that the existence of a manuscript as a model for the wall paintings at the synagogue in Dura Europos was merely hypothetical and that the comparisons between the Dura cycle and later Christian artefacts were not persuasive.²¹⁰

J. Lowden analyses this hypothesis in his study of the earliest illuminated manuscripts of the Bible.²¹¹ He highlights that it is theoretically dangerous and methodologically problematic to use later evidence as the basis for reconstructing the images in lost early biblical manuscripts. 'Imaging the past can be instructive, but the pervasive element of fantasy that is inevitable must always be recognized and acknowledged', he says.²¹²

He also challenges this approach by avoiding placing excessive emphasis on the illustrative nature and purpose of early Christian artefacts. According to him, this theory gives too much importance to the biblical text instead of images, to word instead of image. There are traditions which occur in these images and are independent or not directly connected to biblical texts. It is also important to remember that the vast majority of early Christians were not familiar with the biblical stories (e.g. with the events in Jesus' life) through reading the sacred texts in the

²⁰⁸ The discussion of these questions is available in M. Vinzent's latest monograph, *Marcion and the Dating of the Synoptic Gospels* (2014).

²⁰⁹ H. Strauß, 'Jüdische Vorbilder frühchristlicher Kunst' (1978).

²¹⁰ J. Gutmann, 'The illustrated Jewish manuscript in Antiquity' (1966) and *id.*, 'Illustrated Midrash in the Dura Synagogue paintings' (1983).

²¹¹ J. Lowden, 'The Beginnings of Biblical Illustration' (2007).

²¹² *Ibid.*, 121.

manuscripts, but via their visual representations and their homiletic and catechetical interpretations.

Considering these challenges of this theory, Lowden sets up a new hypothesis, which states that most biblical manuscripts in the early period might not have had images in them at all.²¹³ He changes the direction of the influence between manuscript illustration and other paintings of the early Christian era. He proposes that the illustrated biblical manuscript was a result of the Christian demand for and love of sacred images that had been developing with increasing momentum through the fourth and fifth centuries. Lowden supposes that cycles of biblical images first appeared in public art in churches around 400, and they would have changed the attitudes of Christians so extensively that biblical manuscript illustration emerged as a response to those changes in the fifth and sixth centuries, when the first existing evidence originates from.²¹⁴

K. Kogmann-Appel's theory is published in the same volume as J. Lowden's, the volume in which the earliest biblical manuscripts are studied.²¹⁵ Her main concern is that rejecting the hypothesis of an early manuscript illumination in most cases means rejecting any influence of Jewish biblical iconography on the development of Christian Old Testament cycles. It is also accompanied by the possibility of falling back on the similarly unproven hypothesis of lost writings and oral teachings of the Church Fathers, through which most of the rabbinic elements in early Christian artefacts were transmitted. (This second approach, which supposes oral or literal transfer, is undermined by the fact that even if a rabbinic tradition was known to the Church Fathers, it does not necessarily rule out the possibility of *Jewish* pictorial influence as well.)

On the basis that Jewish-Christian contacts in Late Antiquity were a reality, Kogmann-Appel presumes that the contacts which worked in exegetical level (although in many cases driven by polemical attitudes) could be presented in a pictorial level as well. Biblical exegesis and Old Testament iconography were two differ-

²¹³ E.g., the Christian (or ecclesiastical) portions of the *Chronographer of 354* (*Catalogus Episcoporum* and *Depositio Martyrum*) are simply lists of words and sentences without any images, yet the rest of this 'Almanac de Luxe', i.e. the non-Christian sections, are littered with images and decorations.

²¹⁴ J. Lowden, 'The Beginnings of Biblical Illustration' (2007), 128.

²¹⁵ K. Kogman-Appel, 'Bible illustration and the Jewish tradition' (1999).

ent fields in which these contacts were manifest. The influence of Jewish pictorial models on early Christian Old Testament iconography took place in different contexts and under different circumstances. Kogmann-Appel supposes that a cultural exchange between Christians and Jews 'was more easily undertaken at the practical, everyday level of artistic workshops involving visual models than at the theoretical, exegetical, and theological levels.'²¹⁶ However, what Kogmann-Appel admits can be agreed with. Any effort to specify such a model as being an illuminated manuscript, a model book, or a monumental cycle, and also, to characterize, date, or localize such models can only be hypothetical and often speculative.²¹⁷

Another difficulty is that the hypothetical 'lost manuscript' should have been originated in a Hellenized first- or second-century Jewish community, which according to R. Jensen seems to have been outside the mainstream of rabbinical Judaism.²¹⁸ (Her observation can only be accepted with the restriction that today few scholars would assume anything 'mainstream' for Rabbinic Judaism before the third or fourth century.) A more evident explanation seems to be that Christians used the same Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible as the Jews did (namely the Septuagint).²¹⁹ These writings were understood in a frame of Christian interpretation 'filled with prophetic and symbolic allusions to the coming of Christ and the establishment of the Christian community with its particular rituals'.²²⁰

H. Kessler also tried to move the attention from hypothetical prototypes of Christian images to their cultural, religious, and theological backgrounds at a conference held in Vienna in 1990.²²¹ Kessler presented the Jewish-Christian parallels in art as part of the Late Antique Jewish-Christian polemical dialogue. This transfer demonstrates the tendency to interpret parallels in different religious groups of Late Antiquity in their cultural and historical contexts rather than plainly presupposing lost sources.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 95.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*

²¹⁸ R. Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (2000), 70.

²¹⁹ K. Schubert, 'Jewish Influence on Earliest Christian Painting' (1992), 190.

²²⁰ R. Jensen, *Living Water* (2011), 10.

²²¹ H. L. Kessler, 'Through the Temple Veil' (1990-91).

Having enumerating some observations on the hypothesis of a lost illuminated manuscript in this chapter, R. Sörries' remark can be agreed with, according to whom the whole question must remain open for further academic discussion.²²²

3.7.3. *The theory of deliverance from persecution*

This theory puts great emphasis on the social context of early Christian artefacts. J. Stevenson proposes that since Christians lived in a world in which danger often threatened and occasionally was realized, 'scenes of peril and deliverance from unseen foes, the demons, who inspired pagans and persecutors, and a scene of deliverance implied a victory over the demons as well'.²²³

This theory, which is really useful from a social point of view as seen in the previous paragraph, is also used to give explanation on the decline of some of the most popular themes in the fourth century, especially the Jonah cycle and the story of Noah. After the 'peace of Constantine,' Christians no longer had to face the instant threat of persecution and martyrdom. So, as R. Jensen states, 'certain motifs were retained if they could be recycled for other uses'.²²⁴

It would be also useful to take into account those observations of M. Vinzent's that he made in his book on *Christ's Resurrection in Early Christianity and the Making of the New Testament*.²²⁵ There he opposes the traditional approach to the Jonah cycle as the typology of Christ's resurrection. In his interpretation, the dispute between Jesus and the Pharisees and Sadducees in the gospels²²⁶ was not about the resurrection of the dead, but about the arrival of the end of time, the final judgement. In a similar way, neither is Jesus' simile about Jonah being in the stomach of the fish for three days²²⁷ a prophecy of his own resting in the tomb for three days and his resurrection, nor was Jonah presented as a symbol of Christ's resurrection and eternal life in early Christian writings or iconography. So according to Vinzent, the promise of divine intervention and deliverance is the least promi-

²²² R. Sörries, *Spätantike und frühchristliche Kunst* (2013), 71.

²²³ J. Stevenson, *The Catacombs* (1978), 65.

²²⁴ R. Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (2000), 74.

²²⁵ M. Vinzent, *Christ's Resurrection in Early Christianity* (2011).

²²⁶ *Luke* 11:29-32 and *Matthew* 16:1-4.

²²⁷ *Matthew* 12:40.

nent in the interpretation of the Jonah narrative. It is much more about sin, redemption and preservation.²²⁸

3.7.4. *The theory of the commendatio animae*

This theory invites arguments both for and against it. One of the main advantageous features of this hypothesis is that it takes into account the physical context more. These images predominantly are connected to funerary sites, so it seems quite plausible that they have references to death and mourning.²²⁹ It can be argued that it was the wish of the dead or the family to extend the prayers for salvation after death by assigning them a visual form as well. Another noteworthy point is that a funerary prayer or even a liturgical text can be interpreted directly from the deceased or the mourners' points of view alike.

Despite these arguments, this hypothesis also has some weak points. The representatives of this theory always admit its hypothetical nature and the impossibility of definitive proof. However, they claim that it is so comprehensive that it is the best explanation among other hypotheses.²³⁰

The main concern about this theory is that of chronology. The *ordo commendationis animae*, which contains a similar list of biblical paradigms, cannot be dated to the period when the images being studied were produced.²³¹ The earliest documents describing a Christian ritual for funerals do not predate the eighth and ninth centuries, nor do the earliest rituals for the blessing of the burial ground.²³² The *commendatio animae* prayer itself is denoted in liturgical manuscripts only in the eighth century. F. Paxton presents the Gellone sacramentary as the main source of this prayer, but also mentions the Prague Sacramentary and the Vatican Gelasian sacramentary, all from the Carolingian era.²³³

²²⁸ M. Vinzent, *Christ's Resurrection in Early Christianity* (2011), 22.

²²⁹ This argument is emphasized by J. Stevenson, *The Catacombs* (1978), 65.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*; P. Finney, *The Invisible God* (1994), 282.

²³¹ Finney and Jensen likewise acknowledge the problem of chronology (P. Finney, *The Invisible God* (1994), 283 and R. Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (2000), 71).

²³² 'Texts for the ceremony of *benedictio* (or *consecratio*) *cymeterii* are not to be found in the earliest Pontificals; when they first occur, in the early tenth century, form and language alike point to a Carolingian origin.' (D. Bullough, 'Burial community and belief' (1983), 189).

²³³ F. S. Paxton, *Christianizing Death* (1990), 116-7.

The commendation of the soul prayer appears in the Gellone sacramentary at the end of the service of the burial with the heading: *Orationis [sic] super defunctum vel commendatio animae* (Prayers over the dead and commendation of the soul), and was to be said before death during the final agony. Paxton indicates that it was a radical innovation in the text since the scribe did not have a usual rubric for this moment of the ritual and used an older expression in a new context instead.²³⁴

The commendation in the Gellone sacramentary has the form of a litany. The repeated invocations present a list of comparisons of biblical persons who represent a moment in human history in which God intervened to save one of his faithful. They start with this introduction: 'Free, Lord, the soul of your servant N., just as you freed [...]' and after it these examples are evoked:

- Noah from the deluge,
- Enoch and Elijah from the common death of this world,
- Moses from the hand of Pharaoh, king of the Egyptians,
- Job from his sufferings,
- Daniel from the lion's den,
- the three boys from the fiery furnace and the hands of the evil king,
- Jonah from the stomach of the whale,
- Susanna from false testimony,
- David from the hands of King Saul, Goliath and all his chains,
- Peter and Paul from prison and torments.

And the prayer ends with the words: 'Thus may you see fit to free the soul of this person and grant it a place with you in heavenly delights.'²³⁵

The significance of the *commendatio animae* in Church life can be perceived by the fact that it is included in an anonymous list dating from 802 to 813, which summarizes the knowledge required of priests as the basic knowledge of clerics.²³⁶

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 116.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 118.

²³⁶ *Haec sunt quae iussa sunt discere omnes ecclesiasticos. Fidem catholicam sancti Athenasii et cetera quaecumque de fide; Symbolum etiam apostolicum; Orationem dominicam. [...] Librum sacramentorum pleniter tam canonem missasque speciales ad commutandum pleniter; Exorcismus super caticuminum sive super demoniacos; commendationem animae; [...] Scribere cartas et epistulas. (Monumentum Germaniae Historica, vol. 1: Capitularia regum Francorum (1883), 235).*

But as in many cases, there is an inclination among scholars to bridge the chronological gap somehow with their hypotheses to place the *commendatio animae* prayer and Christian funerary rites in general in an earlier period. For example, J. Stevenson's argument for an earlier dating is the high frequency of the image repertoire, some of which are apparent in the commendation prayer as well.²³⁷

Another attempt is to presuppose a Jewish background behind the early Christian funerary prayers as we have seen a similar approach in the case of the early Christian artefacts generally. For example, F. Paxton, analysing the oldest extant Christian prayer over a corpse, from the prayer book of Bishop Serapion of Thmuis from the mid-fourth century, speculates that this prayer was inspired by a basic pattern with a strongly biblical origin.²³⁸ This kind of prayer emphasizes the righteousness of God and expresses the hope that God would raise up the just again at the end of time.

Paxton himself admits that manuscript witnesses for a Christian funerary liturgy do not appear before the eighth century. However, he deems it possible that there are 'Roman' origins behind particular elements of the rather late witnesses, reasoning that the general nature and structure of the Roman *ordo* of the funerary liturgy probably emerged in the fourth and fifth centuries.²³⁹ With this opinion, he relies on D. Sicard's broad-ranging study of the early medieval liturgy for the dead, who had argued for the applicability of the manuscript tradition to earlier practices in the Latin Church.²⁴⁰

The main difficulty of this argument (very similarly to the case of the lost Jewish manuscript) is that the only known Jewish parallel, the 'Prayer for the recommendation of the soul', which was used by J. Spier in his demonstration,²⁴¹ can be only dated to the ninth century.

R. Jensen has another dilemma with the hypothesis of the *commendatio animae*. According to her, there is no identicalness between the repertoire of early Christian images and the prayer for the deceased. It means that not all of the fig-

²³⁷ J. Stevenson, *The Catacombs* (1984), 78.

²³⁸ F. S. Paxton, *Christianizing Death* (1990), 22.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, 38.

²⁴⁰ D. Sicard, *Liturgie de la mort dans l'église latine des origines à la réforme carolingienne*, (1978), 1-257.

²⁴¹ J. Spier, 'The earliest Christian art' (2007), 8-9.

ures, who are present in the *ordo commendationis animae*, occur in the catalogue of catacomb imagery (e.g. Enoch, Elijah, Lot, and Thecla).²⁴² According to her, the concurrencies are coincidental. She also claims that some of the most popular biblical scenes of the catacombs remain unexplained by this hypothesis. She denotes Adam and Eve, Lazarus, Jonah, the multiplication of the loaves, and the baptism of Jesus as examples.²⁴³

Disproof of this hypothesis can also be found in the studies of É. Rebillard. In his book, *The Care of the Dead in Late Antiquity*,²⁴⁴ he opposes the estimation that assumes collective responsibility for the relations between the living and the dead in the period of early Christianity. He notes that this model is closely linked to the similarly false idea of the existence of a Christian ritual for death and burial in the same period (suggested mainly by liturgists). On the contrary, Rebillard claims: 'the church was no more involved in developing rituals for death and burial than it was, for example, for marriage.'²⁴⁵

He even uses F. Paxton's study, which has been cited in this chapter several times, for highlighting the fact that funerary liturgies emerged only in the Middle Ages, not in Late Antiquity, since church and society were rather different in these two periods of history.²⁴⁶ Rebillard maintains that the preceding and isolated occurrences of some of the elements from the first church authorised funerary liturgy cannot be a satisfactory argument for its estimated earlier dating.²⁴⁷

Instead of such speculation, Rebillard, in harmony with his own theory dominating his book, asserts that funerals primarily remained family matters in the fourth and fifth centuries. There was no distinct 'Christian ritual' that the church attempted to impose on lay-Christians.²⁴⁸ Rebillard employs P.-A. Février's distinction between 'funerals of Christians' and 'Christian funerals'.²⁴⁹ Rebillard does not include the presence of clergy at funerals or the celebration of the Eucharist, but

²⁴² R. Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (2000), 71.

²⁴³ Interestingly, she does not exclude the possible presumption of the existence of another prayer, now lost, which could be a prefiguration for these later examples, 'ideally with cited figures more parallel to those in the iconography' (R. Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (2000), 71.).

²⁴⁴ É. Rebillard, *The Care of the Dead in Late Antiquity* (2009).

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 123.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 124.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 138.

²⁴⁹ P.-A. Février, 'La mort chrétienne' (1987), 881-952.

according to his idea, they were left completely up to the family. It was also the family, not the church, in which the deceased were remembered. The commemoration of the dead in the church was both general and anonymous in the first centuries.²⁵⁰

3.7.5. *The theory of scriptural typologies*

This theory of scriptural typologies emphasizes the conjunction of literary documents and artefacts. One of the main advantages of this approach is that the two types of sources (philological and visual) are practically contemporary and derive from similar geographical and sociological context. It seems that they both indicate the general use of certain images in the evolving traditions of the early church.²⁵¹ This theory assumes that commentaries and homilies on biblical texts facilitate the study of the hermeneutical function of images.

This attitude presumes a close dependence between the biblical text and its artistic representations. To provide a suitable example, a reference to a subsequently discussed argument seems appropriate. There is an ambiguous image from the SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber in Sopianae which will be studied in detail in Chapter 8. In the iconographic identification of the picture, G. Heidl argues that it should be recognised as the Three Youths in the Fiery Furnace rather than the Magi from the *Gospel of Matthew*, in view of the fact, that this particular painting depicts the text of the *Book of Daniel* in a more accurate way than it was usual.²⁵²

E. Goodenough also unfolded his views on the typological attitude of early Christian artefacts through the example of Daniel's story. According to him, the 'types,' like Daniel in the lions' den, may represent the triumphant Christ or the Christian believer saved by his faith. The two interpretations should not be sharply distinguished though 'since the same symbol can, as with the sheep, represent both the Savior and the saved.'²⁵³ Christians frequently represented Daniel in the lions' den, the Three Youths in the Fiery Furnace, the Jonah cycle, Noah in the ark and the sacrifice of Isaac. Goodenough states that this is caused by the fact that they were

²⁵⁰ É. Rebillard, *The Care of the Dead in Late Antiquity* (2009), xii.

²⁵¹ R. Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (2000), 79.

²⁵² G. Heidl, 'A három ifjú a tüzes kemencében' ['The three youths in the fiery furnace'] (2005).

²⁵³ E. Goodenough, 'Catacomb Art' (1962), 136.

all types of Christ and his saving power. This opinion of Goodenough should be considered and can be argued for or against. But his other proposal in this article that the motivation behind this custom would have been that 'Christians had no figures of their own to represent that power'²⁵⁴ seems to be oversimplifying the early Christians' attitude to the Jewish roots and to the Hebrew Bible and also underrating their intellectual potential.

Although R. Jensen proves herself to be sympathetic to the approach of this theory, she does not ignore a problematic factor about it. Because stressing the parallels between visual and textual interpretation of biblical narratives can overshadow the fact that the Bible was not the only source for the themes of early Christian artefacts. It does not only mean that some themes were adapted from oral or apocryphal traditions (e.g. Peter and Paul unchained, Peter striking the rock, Thecla), but also that the themes, the compositions and the ways they were focused surpass 'what is strictly biblical either in source or in message'.²⁵⁵ However, Jensen's conclusion confirming the role of canonical scriptures can be agreed to: they 'were a proof text for every aspect of the church's tradition more broadly'.²⁵⁶

3.7.6. *The theory of sacramental life*

The strength of this approach lies in its comprehensive explanation. Just as the whole life of the individual and of Christian communities was predominantly marked by and represented in sacraments (primarily baptism and Eucharist), in the same way, this sacramental theory embraces a wide range of aspects of early Christian iconography. This sacramental interpretation allows great consistency throughout the analysis of early Christian iconographical programs reckoning with the context, composition, and selection of the art seriously.

This theory is akin to the hypothesis of the *commendatio animae*, as it also presumes a liturgical context or source for the iconography. However, instead of presupposing the existence of a particular document of early Christian worship with the aim to account for the subjects presented in the art, it relies on established

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 134.

²⁵⁵ R. Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (2000), 79.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

methods of biblical interpretation and catechesis.²⁵⁷ The allegorical or typological interpretation of biblical narratives in early Christian literature leads the receptive audience to a higher level of reality. Similarly, the sacraments are also symbolic, drawing the partaker into a sphere that is not attained simply through the senses. That is why it seems appropriate to refer to these great mysteries visually with a language of symbols.²⁵⁸

This approach also has some aspects which cannot be taken as evidence without questioning. Although Christians undeniably listened to sermons that employed the exegetical strategies mentioned previously, it does not necessarily suggest that artists would use the symbolic equations of those theologians whose writings have survived. (A. Grabar argues, however, that theologians like Origen, Tertullian, Gregory of Nyssa, Ambrose, and Augustine invited the artists of images to do that.²⁵⁹) Based on these, a moderate and safer conclusion proposed by R. Jensen can be supported, whereby these pictorial figures or literary allusions shared a common and more general purpose, which was 'to draw out the hidden or deeper implication of stories from scripture.'²⁶⁰

Another aspect of this model that would suggest some caution is that it cannot be applicable to all cases. There are images which obviously fit the model but not all of them. For instance, scenes like the raising of Lazarus, Daniel in the lions' den, or Adam and Eve are not typically considered part of the sacramental (or baptismal) cycles but frequently occur in the catacomb paintings.

There are other biblical narratives which are connected to baptism in patristic literature but are not represented in visual art. R. Jensen instances some of those most obvious typologies from the literature that rarely appear in the paintings. These are: Jesus walking on the water (*Matthew* 14:22-33),²⁶¹ the crossing of the Red Sea (*Exodus* 14), Naaman, the Syrian's cleansing (*2 Kings* 5), Elisha throwing the axe-head into the Jordan (*2 Kings* 6:5-7), Nicodemus asking about being born again (*John* 3:1-21) or the blood and water flowing from Jesus' side at the crucifixion (*John*

²⁵⁷ R. Jensen, *Living water* (2011), 33.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 34.

²⁵⁹ A. Grabar, *Christian Iconography* (1969), 143.

²⁶⁰ R. Jensen, *Living water* (2011), 38.

²⁶¹ It also appears in both the Dura Europos and Naples baptisteries.

19:34).²⁶² These all are present in fourth-century catechetical documents as different *types* of baptism.²⁶³ So this model cannot be viewed as a sole and general explanation for all the imagery, either.

²⁶² R. Jensen, *Living water* (2011), 38-9.

²⁶³ For example, Ambrose, *Sacr.* 2.4.10; 5.13-14, and *Spir.* 10.63. John Chrysostom, *Catech. illum.* 3.16-17.

4. Pannonia and Sopianae

Before moving to the early Christian art scenery of Sopianae to read it against the background, which have been set out in the previous chapters, Roman Pannonia and Sopianae will be studied in this chapter to allow a better understanding of the historical and social background of the people in Sopianae. For this purpose, this chapter will provide a short introduction to the history of Pannonia and particularly, of Sopianae. It will be demonstrated how the geopolitical position of the province effected the identity of its population. The history of Christianity in the region will be overviewed highlighting the role of Arianism in it. Finally, the history of the Christian community in Sopianae will be studied and the assumption of an episcopal see in the town considered.

4.1. The Province of Pannonia and Pannonian Identity

Following a campaign by the young Tiberius in 15 BC, Pannonia was officially annexed in 11 BC. (Figure 1) The process of the annexation is rather obscure. However, it was probably a gradual advance northwards as far as the line of the Danube.²⁶⁴ The province was itself created and formed by the Romans to administer a large and exceedingly diverse area. After the rebellion of the Pannonians with the Dalmatians and other Illyrian tribes between 6 and 12 AD, the province of Illyricum was dissolved, and its lands were divided between the new provinces of Pannonia in the north and Dalmatia in the south. The date of the division is unknown, most certainly after 20 AD, but before 50 AD.

The geography of Roman Pannonia shows great diversity. (Figure 2) Its territory included mountains, steppe lands, broad expanses of alluvial soils and vast forests. The two major climatic zones of Europe, the Mediterranean and north-

²⁶⁴ P. Parker, *The Empire Stops Here* (2010), 168.

European collide in this region. This diversity and the fact that it was a meeting place of the northern and southern cultures and mentalities became palpable in the lifestyles of the populations which adapted themselves to these environments.²⁶⁵

The Danube formed the natural boundary of the province to the north up to the great bend in the river north of modern Budapest and the eastern boundary south of the bend almost as far as modern Belgrade where the flow gradually returns to an eastwardly course. The rivers Drava and Sava, two main tributaries of the Danube also fell within the territory of Roman administration. The situation of Pannonia province was highly characterised by its location on the edge of the Roman Empire.

This position at the frontier brought about several consequences. One of them was the presence of Roman legions in the region, which gave the province a general military character. Another consequence was the ambiguous connection to the barbarian peoples on the other side of the *limes*. They were considered outsiders, even the enemy who should be kept out. The evenly spaced forts along the *limes* served as military strongholds for this purpose. During the second half of the fourth century, a series of rectangular, fortress-like enclosures were built along the *limes* providing an interior frontier line behind the Danube. The walls of these settlements were typically strengthened by round towers, so that the enclosed granaries for the imperial *annona*, churches and slighter structures were secured inside of them.²⁶⁶

The same locations proved to be excellent centres of commercial dealings with the barbarians. It is no wonder that tribes living near the riverine frontier of the Danube preferred the stable peace to resistance to Rome in many cases. The harmonious connection was mutually beneficial since trade between the neighbouring populations meant economic advantages for both sides. For example, the Quadi and the Marcomanni who lived outside the *limes* of Pannonia in the territory of modern Moravia and Slovakia had a long history as that of friendly barbarians.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁵ T. S. Burns, *Rome and the Barbarians* (2003), 194-5.

²⁶⁶ S. Mitchell, *A History of the Later Roman Empire* (2006), 359.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 80.

There is a story in the historiography of Ammianus Marcellinus that demonstrates this attitude of the barbarians.²⁶⁸ In 375, emperor Valentinian I (364-375)'s attention was turned to the middle Danubian region and particularly to his home province of Pannonia. He spent three months at Carnuntum in the northern part of Pannonia, and also led a punitive attack against barbarian villages from Aquincum across the Danube. After he returned to Brigetio, representatives of the Quadi approached him seeking amnesty. In their petition, foreign brigands were blamed for anti-Roman behaviour who might have infiltrated into their territory near the river. They mentioned an affront against them caused by Roman fort-building across the Danube. This drove Valentinian into a fit of apoplectic anger and he died of a seizure.²⁶⁹ Nonetheless, peace came into being through the emperor's leading generals. The demolition of the bridge across the Danube, which had been built to enable an invasion of barbarian territory, was ordered.²⁷⁰

The geopolitical position of the province, the population containing a good number of migrants from other parts of the Empire and the special relationship between its inhabitants and the neighbouring peoples, which has been demonstrated previously, had a great impact on the identity development of the province.

The immigrants had different attitudes towards the construction and presentation of their identities in Pannonia. Partly, they were to maintain Barbarian otherness, partly, they were assiduous in taking up a Roman identity, or probably even more so, they were somewhere between the two extremes on the scale of assimilation. The Pannonian identity was not monolithic, rather composed of many different shades of the palette. Pannonia's population, similarly to the other Danubian provinces, gained the real character of its identity during the fourth century. The specifically Pannonian identity was individualized by indigenous elements which had primarily patriotic and religious features.

²⁶⁸ Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res gestae*, 30. 6-10.

²⁶⁹ *Res gestae*, 30.6.

²⁷⁰ Z. Mráv, 'Valentinianus ...' (1999); P. Bernát, 'I. Valentinianus védelmi koncepciója és a 374-75-ös kvád-római háború' [Valentinian I's defence conception and the Quadi-Roman war in 374/375], (2006).

Two Croatian scholars, D. Dzino and A. D. Kunić have provided a plausible presentation of the Pannonian identity.²⁷¹ They affirm that the particular context of the Pannonian identity-narrative became most expressed from 363 to 383 during the reigns of the Pannonian emperors, namely Jovian, Valentinian I, Valens and Gratian. These emperors stemmed from the specifically military culture of the Illyricians, who fought for Rome many times and protected the frontiers of the Empire. The external and internal perception of these emperors' identity is based on this. They identified themselves as the guardians of Rome and through this, of ancient Roman virtues. They developed their own version of Romanness. This self-image emphasized their manliness, military bravery and courageous commitment to *patria Pannonia*. This self-perception probably developed and maintained by the Illyricians was transmitted and expanded to the whole population of Pannonia. The other side of the coin was the negative stereotype adhered to these militant people. They were considered 'as a crude, uncultured and cruel bunch: the internal "others" of the Empire.'²⁷²

There were changes in the Pannonian society in the fourth century. These changes can be detected through the development of settlements in the urban and in the rural areas as well. The countryside was the scene of the rise of fortified villas, the so called *villae rusticae*, which beyond being the centres of the agricultural production became the hubs of industry, trade, defence and religion locally. 'They represented the backbone of Pannonian economy.'²⁷³

There is also archaeological evidence that there was a flowering city life particularly in the southern region of Pannonia, like in Siscia, Mursa, Sirmium or Sopianae in the fourth century. The reason for the development of the towns in the inner part of Pannonia lies in a change regarding how the defence of the *limes* was organised. The new strategy in the fourth century withdrew all or parts of the major military troops into the interior of the provinces in order to produce a concentrated and mobile force which could be called out and used in action as needed. This realignment eventuated a decline of the towns on the frontiers, like Aquincum, and the

²⁷¹ D. Dzino, A. D. Kunić, 'Pannonians: Identity-perceptions from the late Iron Age to Later Antiquity' (2012).

²⁷² *Ibid.*, 107.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, 107.

emersion of other better situated ones, like Sopianae. This strategic reorganization led to great changes in Sopianae in particular, as it shall be discussed later. In parallel with this process, the presence of people with recent barbarian ancestry increased in the army and also new settlers from similar background appeared in the countryside.²⁷⁴

The development of urban life provided fertile soil for the early development of Christianity in the area as it will be discussed in the following section. The increasing progress of Christianity made the palette of identities even more multi-coloured in the province. The question of a special Christian identity in the period will be studied in the chapter discussing burial chambers of the Sopianae cemetery. The Christian–non-Christian dichotomy will prove to have an extreme importance in the interpretation of the decoration of the Burial Chamber with the Jar (see Chapter 10.2).

There is an illustrious figure in fourth-century Pannonia who can serve as a proper example for a complex personal identity-narrative from the same region and era. The church father Jerome (347-420) was born in Stridon, in an unidentified town on the frontier between Pannonia and Dalmatia, to a rich landowning family.²⁷⁵ Jerome's personal identity was compound. The Roman inheritance and literacy, the social status in the provincial elite and the sense of Christianity was interwoven in his identity and formed a complex whole.

4.2. Sopianae and the Subdivision of Pannonia

Pannonia province was first divided into two parts at the end of the first century and these two Pannonian provinces were further apportioned into halves in the last decade of the third century. This second subdivision proved to be crucial in the history of the town of Sopianae. (Figure 3)

During the reign of Emperor Diocletian (284-305), the earlier larger provinces, Pannonia Superior and Pannonia Inferior were subdivided into smaller parts

²⁷⁴ T. Burns, *Rome and the Barbarians* (2003), 360.

²⁷⁵ J.N.D. Kelly, *Jerome* (1975).

due to a reform in government and administration. Human and fiscal resources were concentrated upon provincial capitals and a few other towns in the interior of Pannonia. It made some of them prosper as never before.

Because of this, the region of the former Pannonia Inferior north to the Drava became the province Valeria, to the south Pannonia Secunda. Sopianae having become the capital of the province Valeria flourished as the provincial government was shifted there. Following the military troops and the imperial bureaucracy, the hub of agriculture and commerce also transferred into the interior of the province. For example, agricultural production organized around villas was thriving around Sopianae at this time.²⁷⁶

It also happened during this reorganization that the previously unified administration was separated: the home of the civil governor (*praeses*) became Sopianae, while the military commissioner (*dux*) was incessantly housed in Aquincum.²⁷⁷ Nonetheless, Aquincum, the former centre of the province turned into decline, since its garrison was reduced on imperial orders.

E. Tóth challenged the theory that ascertains that the relocation of the civil administration centre to Sopianae caused the sudden efflorescence of the town. On the contrary, he asserts that the process was reverse. In the second half of the third century, Sopianae had been developing in such a pace that it led to it being elected as the centre of the newly established province of Valeria. The governor and his *officium* moved to Sopianae since Sopianae had already been on the journey of urbanization and development.²⁷⁸ (Figure 4)

²⁷⁶ T. Burns, *Rome and the Barbarians* (2003), 360.

²⁷⁷ The role of the military commissioner is not completely clarified. There are excavated stamped bricks dated to the fourth century with the inscription *exercitus Pannoniae Inferioris*, i.e. 'of the army of Lower Pannonia'. Thus, it cannot be excluded that the military governance or the army leadership did not accommodate the new administrative system immediately. Cf. C. Pozsárkó, 'Sopianae korabeli források és feliratos kőemlékek alapján' [Sopianae Based on the Contemporary Sources and Stone Monuments with Inscriptions] (2001), 3.

²⁷⁸ E. Tóth, 'A pogány és keresztény Sopianae' [The Pagan and Christian Sopianae], (2006), 53.

4.3. Christianity in Pannonia and in Sopianae

Christianity moved into the Danube provinces in the second half of the third century. The advance of Christianity, however, occurred in a significantly slower pace in Pannonia compared to the neighbouring Balkans or Italy.²⁷⁹ This peculiarity in the history of the province has been explained by the predominance of the army in local society and politics,²⁸⁰ the low level of urbanization,²⁸¹ the undifferentiated and in many ways archaic character of society in Pannonia²⁸² and by the lack of a Hellenized, Greek speaking population in the province.²⁸³

There is no evidence of Christian communities in Pannonia from before the middle of the third century.²⁸⁴ The first certain indication for the Pannonian Christian hierarchy originates from around 260. Pollio, a lector in Cibalae, who was martyred in 303, mentions Eusebius, the bishop of the same town, as an example, since his own martyrdom occurred on the same day of the year as Eusebius'.²⁸⁵ According to Pollio, Eusebius' execution took place earlier (*persecutio superior*), most probably during the persecutions ordered by Emperor Valerian.²⁸⁶

It seems possible that Christians not only lived at Cibalae at this time, but they might have already appeared in some other places in the territories between the rivers Drava and Sava. The earliest communities were established in the surrounding area of Sirmium at Singidunum, Mursa, and Siscia in the Danube–Sava region, 'where Orientals attracted to the headquarters of the Illyriciani and later to the imperial court'.²⁸⁷ If these communities had really existed, they must have been affected by the persecutions, too.²⁸⁸

²⁷⁹ L. Balics, *A kereszténység története hazánk mai területén a magyarok letelepedéséig* [The History of Christianity in the Modern Territory of Hungary until the Settlement of the Hungarians] (1901), 7.

²⁸⁰ A. Mócsy, *Pannonia a késői császárkorban* [Pannonia in the Late Imperial Era] (1974), 45.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 164.

²⁸² I. Tóth, *A rómaiak Magyarországon*, [The Romans in Hungary] (1975), 190.

²⁸³ I. Bilkei, 'Die griechischen Inschriften des römischen Ungarns' (1979).

²⁸⁴ A. Mócsy, J. Fitz, *Pannonia régészeti kézikönyve* [The Archaeological Handbook of Pannonia] (1990), 260.

²⁸⁵ *The Record of Martyrdom of St. Pollio Primericus Lector in Cibalae*. H. Tamás, 'Passio Pollionis (BHL 6869)' (2012), cf. Alojzija Ulman, 'Neka razmišljanja o ranom kršćanstvu u Cibalama' (1992).

²⁸⁶ M. Jarak, 'Povijest starokršćanskih zajednica na tlu kontinentalne Hrvatske' (1994).

²⁸⁷ A. Mócsy, *Pannonia and Upper Moesia* (1974).

²⁸⁸ R. Bratož, 'Die diokletianische Christenverfolgung in den Donau- und Balkanprovinzen' (2004).

The expansion of the Christian communities occurred between the above-mentioned persecutions in the middle of the third century and the next one at the beginning of the fourth century.²⁸⁹ Christians enjoyed a relative freedom and peaceful community life in this region, too for about half a century after the reign of Emperor Valerian. Former community rooms and cemeteries could be used again and even new ones might have been built, although the signs of Christian presence remain still scattered up to the Constantinian era.²⁹⁰

The first followers of the Christian faith were basically Greek-speakers in Pannonia. On the basis of the surviving grave inscriptions, the majority of Christians in Pannonia bore Greek names,²⁹¹ similarly to bishops.²⁹² The proportion of Latin bishops prevails only from the middle of the fourth century onwards. However, also not all with Latin names are assumed to have been of local origin, but rather Greek.²⁹³

The fact that many Christians had a Hellenised eastern background does not exclude the assumption that most of them immigrated to Pannonia via the great ports of the Adriatic Sea, which were important sites of trade between the eastern and western parts of the empire. Presumably, just the vivid economic relations can give an explanation as to why the Oriental immigration, and with it the presence of Christians did not cease after the crises in the third century at all. Among the merchant cities, Aquileia²⁹⁴ played a primary role in the history of Pannonian Christianity. Christianity advanced through the mediation of the church of the Northern Italian city of Aquileia, which followed the orthodoxy of the Roman church.²⁹⁵

In Pannonia, not only orthodox groups of Christianity were present. The provinces of Illyricum and Pannonia were the centre of Arianism in the western half of the Roman Empire.²⁹⁶ The Arian position was asserted at different synods in the

²⁸⁹ There is a good study on the persecutions during the reign of Diocletian in Pannonia by Levente Nagy (*Pannóniai városok, mártírok, ereklyék* [Cities, Martyrs and Relics in Pannonia] (2012), 23-34).

²⁹⁰ A. Mócsy, J. Fitz, *Pannonia régészeti kézikönyve* [The Archaeological Handbook of Pannonia] (1990), 261.

²⁹¹ A. Mócsy, *Pannonia and Upper Moesia*, (1974), 331.

²⁹² One of the earliest Danubian bishops known by name was Victorianus, a Greek.

²⁹³ *Fontes Pannoniae Antiquae in aetate Tetrarchum*, P. Kovács (ed.) (2011); A. Mócsy, *Pannonia and Upper Moesia*, (1974), 331; G. Bevelacqua, 'Observations on Christian Epigraphy in Pannonia' (2014).

²⁹⁴ S. Tavano, 'Aquileia' (2001).

²⁹⁵ E. Thomas, 'Religion' (1980), 193.

²⁹⁶ M. Meslin, *Les Ariens d'occident* (1967), 335-430.

350s and 360s, especially at the synod of Sirmium in 357,²⁹⁷ 'which drafted the earliest Latin statement on Arianism extant today'.²⁹⁸ The Arian influence was mostly present in the proximity of the imperial court at Sirmium where the members of the hierarchy could be involved in high politics. 'The bishops of towns that lay further from Sirmium either played no part at all or entered church politics only as secondary followers of this party or the other.'²⁹⁹

Arianism lost its influence due to the efficient activity of Bishop Ambrose of Milan. In 378, Arian heresy was unanimously condemned by the bishops who assembled for a synod in Sirmium, and with Ambrose's support, Anemius became the new orthodox bishop of Sirmium, the previous centre of the Arians in the region.³⁰⁰ The conversion to orthodoxy culminated at the anti-Arian synod of Aquileia in 381 when the last Arian bishop from Pannonia was deposed.³⁰¹

Even if there is no direct evidence for it, Arianism has been associated with Sopiana, too. T. Nagy supposed that a certain Paulus, who is mentioned as an Arian bishop in Pannonia in the 360s, was the head of the church in Sopiana.³⁰² This assumption was discredited by A. Mócsy³⁰³ and later by K. Hudák as well.³⁰⁴ It is difficult to present any relevant archaeological evidence in favour of the presence of Arians in Sopiana.³⁰⁵

Although Arianism and other non-orthodox Christian tendencies are well documented in literary sources, it is difficult to demonstrate their presence through non-literary evidences because of the general spread and meaning of early Christian symbols and items. Despite this, K. Hudák attempted to evince the visual representation of the clash between orthodoxy and Arianism in the iconographic program of the SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber in Sopiana.³⁰⁶

²⁹⁷ C. Pietri, 'Die Konzilien von Sirmium (378) und Aquileia (381)' (2003), 454.

²⁹⁸ H. Rosenberg, 'Valens' (1999).

²⁹⁹ A. Mócsy, *Pannonia and Upper Moesia*, (1974), 331.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 331.

³⁰¹ C. Pietri, 'Die Konzilien von Sirmium (378) und Aquileia (381)' (2003), 455.

³⁰² T. Nagy, *A kereszténység története a pannóniai védőrendszer összeomlásáig* [The History of Christianity Until the Collapse of the Defense System in Pannonia] (1939), 210-7.

³⁰³ A. Mócsy, *Pannonia a késői császárkorban* [Pannonia in the Late Imperial Era] (1974), 165.

³⁰⁴ K. Hudák, *A Fine and Private Place* (2009), 10, note 18.

³⁰⁵ Z. Magyar, 'Jelen volt-e Sopiana-ban az arianizmus?' [Was Arianism Present in Sopiana?] (2012).

³⁰⁶ K. Hudák, 'The iconographical program of the wallpaintings' (2009), 71-5.

It seems highly probable that besides the municipal episcopal sees, there were numerous smaller regional bishoprics established in other Pannonian towns. The Christian communities of Savaria, Scarbantia, Gorsium and Aquincum all might have had their own bishops.³⁰⁷ The same can also be assumed of Sopianae.

There is no surviving mention of any bishop of Sopianae. A. Mócsy's remark can be applied as an explanation for this fact. According to him, since the bishops, who lived further off the imperial centre at Sirmium, typically took part in the different political and church political affairs in less amount, they were named in the sources only exceptionally or by chance.³⁰⁸

However, the existence of a hypothesized episcopal see in Sopianae can be well argued. One of the main arguments for the assumption of a bishopric see in Sopianae is based on contemporary ecclesial law.³⁰⁹ Canon 6 of the Synod of Serdica in 341 ordered that the villages and smaller towns needed to be presided over by presbyters with the more populous cities by bishops. This was affirmed in canon 57 of the Synod of Laodicea in the 360/70s.³¹⁰

A second reasonable argument in favour of a bishop in Sopianae is its comparison to other towns of Pannonia of a similar status. According to T. Nagy, Sopianae should have been the ecclesiastical centre of province Valeria, naturally with an episcopal see, in the same way as Savaria and Siscia, the other headquarters of *praeses*.³¹¹

There is a third argument for an episcopal see in Sopianae. O. Gábor has used archaeological data of the cemetery of Sopianae to argue for the well-organized character of the local church.³¹² (Figure 5) His arguments are the following: the existence of a separated Christian part in the cemetery of Sopianae; the established structure, roads and drainage in this cemetery area; the possible pres-

³⁰⁷ E. Thomas, 'Religion' (1980), 196.

³⁰⁸ A. Mócsy, *Pannonia and Upper Moesia* (1974), 331.

³⁰⁹ This opinion has been shared most recently by O. Gábor ('Sopianae ókeresztény egyháza(i)' [The Early Christian Church(es) of Sopianae] (2007), 105) and K. Hudák (*A Fine and Private Place* (2009), 10).

³¹⁰ C. H. Turner (ed.), *Ecclesiae occidentalis monumenta iuris antiquissima* I/2, pars 3 (1890), col. 500a.

³¹¹ T. Nagy, *A kereszténység története a pannoniai védőrendszer összeomlásáig* [The History of Christianity Until the Collapse of the Defense System in Pannonia], (1939), 205, 207-14, 218, 223.

³¹² O. Gábor, 'Sopianae ókeresztény egyháza(i)' [The Early Christian Church(es) of Sopianae] (2007), 105-22.

ence of martyr relics in Burial Chamber Nos. I and V; the community buildings in the cemetery (like *Cella Septichora*, a community crypt in 8 Apáca Street, Burial Chamber No. V, the hypothesized cemetery basilica) or the rebuilding of others for community purposes (like the Early Christian Mausoleum or 14 Apáca Street); and the adherence to the traditional Christian funerary practices (the lack of cremation, the orientation of graves and cemetery buildings, the apsidal closure of the buildings, the modesty of items buried in the graves, the frequency of Christian symbols in the decoration). This archaeological argument supports the assertion of a well-organized Sopianae church. O. Gábor's conclusion is that such a church must have been headed by a bishop.³¹³

The available sources of the Christian community in Sopianae are rather sporadic.³¹⁴ It is the archaeological findings that provide direct and indirect information about church life in the town predominantly, as previously seen in O. Gábor's argument.

³¹³ *Ibid.*, 120.

³¹⁴ A good collection and analysis of the Roman inscriptions is provided by C. Pozsárkó, 'Sopianae korabeli források és feliratos kőemlékek alapján' [Sopianae Based on the Contemporary Sources and Stone Monuments with Inscriptions] (2001).

5. The Question of the Presence of Martyr Relics in Sopianae

In this section, the question of the presence of martyr relics in Sopianae, particularly in the SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber will be analysed. First, some preliminary remarks will be made on the cult of martyrs generally, and particularly on the Church of Rome in the fourth century. The attitude towards martyrs was expressed through the veneration and translation of their relics and through the erection of the *martyria*, the term referring to memorial places of martyr cults. Some writings of Gregory of Nyssa will be cited to present a contemporaneous voice on martyr cult. This study will refer to the role of Pope Damasus I and Bishop Ambrose of Milan in the promotion of the cult of the martyrs in the Western church. Then, the hypothesis of the presence of martyr relics in the SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber will be examined studying archaeological and iconographic parallels.

5.1. Remarks on Christian Burial Customs in the Fourth Century

To learn more about the position of the late Roman upper classes (either ‘pagan’ or Christian), studying the funerary customs of that period cannot be avoided. Burials and the associated artefacts from the Roman world are disproportionately overrepresented among the archaeological evidence. The aim of this section is to remark on some specific points of the Christian funerary traditions in the fourth century. Some general characteristics of Christian burials will be discussed in a socio-historical context. Later, two features of the Christian burial customs of the fourth century will be highlighted: first, the similarities between the dual function of the Roman house and the Roman tomb, and then the importance of the closeness of the buried person to the martyrs and saints with respect to both topography and art.

5.1.1. *Remarks on the quality of relationship between groups in the late Roman society*

The contemporaneous attitude of the upper classes to arts was an exceptional openness. The new élites formed in the fourth century were characterized by inclusiveness in flavour. The splendid new art of the age is mainly the work of craftsmen and patrons who felt themselves shaken free from the restraints of previous generations.³¹⁵ P. Brown asserts:

Like so much of the religion and the culture of Late Antiquity, the distinctive 'Late Antique' style of the art of the fourth century was not a totally new departure: it has its roots in a culture obscurely prepared in the two preceding centuries, by humble men who still lived in the shadow of exclusive aristocracies.³¹⁶

Studying the status of Christians in society, Brown declares that although a Christian was a real member of the local community living in any corner of the Roman Empire, 'he could become a radical cosmopolitan. His literature, his beliefs, his art and his jargon were extraordinarily uniform, whether he lived in Rome, Lyons, Carthage or Smyrna.'³¹⁷ According to this perspective, the fact that Christians shared their belief with groups of like-minded people all over the empire made them associated with each other on a deeper level than with those living in their more immediate community on any other segment of their lives.

There are other directions in the academic studies of this area. There are scholars who put a greater stress on the similar attitudes among the different groups of the late Roman society and the continuity with the previous periods. In his recent article, M. Humphries has demonstrated providing a series of evidence that the population of Late Antique cities were as conscious of their honour and status as their predecessors had been in the early imperial era. He mentions the fact that a great number of bishops around the Roman Empire were often affected by distress because status concerns intruded into their basilicas and distracted the

³¹⁵ P. Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity* (1971), 38.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 64.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 66.

celebration of the liturgy.³¹⁸ He cites one of the homilies of John Chrysostom, which contains scathing criticism against the arrogance of men:

In just the same way the rich man enters [the church], displaying himself to the poor man, instilling awe in him with his sartorial equipment, and his many slaves surrounding him to shoo away the crowd. [...] Indeed, he considers that because he has come to church, he has graced us and the people – and perhaps even God. (John Chrysostom, Hom. in 2 Thess, 3.3)

It is noteworthy in how many ways the places of the living and the dead overlapped in Roman tradition. In his study, A. Wallace-Hadrill makes a comparison between the traditional Roman house and the Roman tomb. According to him, the Roman *domus* has a Janus-like character, looking in two directions, outwards and inwards.

It looks outwards to the world beyond its doors, *foris*, and to those visitors from outside who penetrate its doors. In looking to the outsiders (strangers, clients, guests, friends, outsiders in varying degrees) it seeks to impress, and makes statements about the status and identity of the insiders. Simultaneously it looks inwards, *domi*, for it is a space also articulated for the insiders, who have their own crucial social distinctions: slave and free, men and women, adults and children.³¹⁹

This dual function is similarly valid for the Roman tomb.

It looks outward, to the passing visitor, the *hospes* often invoked by the epitaph, the unknown stranger who stands for everybody, since the tomb is deliberately placed close to the major thoroughfares leading into the city. [...] But they also look inward, to a closed circle of the family, those who gather with their wine and roses and violets on the festal days, and gradually, one by one, take their resting places within.³²⁰

A. Wallace-Hadrill's hypothesis proposes that external and internal functions are present in all Roman burials at the same time, but that the balance between them can vary substantially. He asserts that the outward and inward divisions are in a complex relationship, whose patterns changed over time.³²¹

³¹⁸ M. Humphries, 'Liturgy and Laity in Late-Antique Rome' (2014).

³¹⁹ A. Wallace-Hadrill, 'Housing the Dead' (2008), 46. In my understanding, Wallace-Hadrill's hypothesis is not only supported but also further developed by the description of the connection between the late Roman *domus* and the open façades in Roman churches in Olof Brandt's recent article ['The archaeology of Roman ecclesial architecture and the study of early Christian liturgy' (2014)]. In both cases, the open façade could provide separation, but also view from outside at the same time.

³²⁰ A. Wallace-Hadrill, 'Housing the Dead' (2008), 47.

³²¹ *Ibid.*, 48.

5.1.2. *Remarks on Christian burial customs*

The burial of the dead played an important role in the life of early Christians. It was regarded as a duty of supreme importance among them, in the same way as among all their contemporaries, particularly when individuals belonged to the same household or funerary association.³²² The death of a family member, friend, or dependent was a far more common experience in the lives of Romans than for us today.³²³ J. Bodel estimates that although we know only of approximately 1% of the burials from the city of Rome from 25 BC to 325 AD,³²⁴ yet their significance is outstanding, because it provides 'a much more material attestation of a facet of ordinary life in Rome than survives for any other aspect of sociocultural life.'³²⁵

If we try to extend our understanding about the sociological background of early Christians in the late Roman Empire, tombs can lead to useful consequences, for they demonstrated the wealth or social position of the deceased and his family. On the basis of the general arrangement and the visual decoration of a grave or a tomb, it is possible to draw conclusions about the financial status, religious denomination or artistic taste of the customers. This deducing process can be done more effectively in the case of the upper layer of society. As J. Stevenson states:

The cost of decoration must generally have been borne by the more well-to-do Christians, and the social status of Christians buried in this or that part of a cemetery may be estimated from the amount of paintings, or of positions suitable for paintings.³²⁶

Roman tombs were not only for commemorating the deceased, but they were used as gathering places for the living as well as for the dead. Family members and friends visited graves at specified times in order to honour the departed, especially by sharing a meal with them. As R. Jensen states: 'consolation and nourishment were thus offered to mourners as well as to their departed loved ones, and

³²² J. Stevenson, *The Catacombs* (1978), 7. Stevenson mentions a case when the clergy of Rome wrote to the clergy of Carthage to remind them of their duties. 'The greatest of these is', they wrote, 'that, if the bodies of martyrs and others are not buried, a great responsibility lies on those whose duty this is.'

³²³ 'The mortality rate in developed countries today is under 15 per 1,000, in contrast to the Roman mortality rate of nearly 40 per 1,000 per year.' (R. Saller, 'Introduction' (2008), 1).

³²⁴ J. Bodel, 'From *Columbaria* to Catacombs' (2008).

³²⁵ R. Saller, 'Introduction' (2008), 1.

³²⁶ J. Stevenson, *The Catacombs* (1978), 60.

social contact was established at least briefly, between the upper and lower worlds.³²⁷ More elaborate family enclosures (including furnishings, facilities for pouring libations, or preparing and sharing simple food offerings) and grave goods (like drinking cups, bowls, and other dishware) give evidence of the prosperity of the particular family.

5.1.3. *In the closeness of saints: martyria in provinces and burial ad sanctos in Rome*

Finding a resting place close to the tombs of martyrs had a high value among the Christians of the fourth century. The promotion of the martyr cult during the papacy of Damasus (366-384) increased the number of the so called burials *ad sanctos*,³²⁸ although it was already present in a moderate form in the decades before him.³²⁹ Later, not only the physical closeness itself was essential, but also its architectural and visual expression.

Studying private worship and religious changes in Late Antiquity, K. Bowes has demonstrated that relic cult played an important role in the Christian life of provincial and suburban elites. They often enriched their *mausolea* with relics. Such was the deaconess Eusebia who had the relics of the Forty Martyrs placed over her casket in her villa-mausoleum.³³⁰ In 394, Rufinus as a prefect built a great *martyrium* to the apostles Peter and Paul adjoining his villa at Chalcedon, whose relics he had acquired during a visit to Rome some five years previously. This villa-*Apostoleion* complex also included his own tomb, near the relics.³³¹ Relying on this evidence, K. Bowes suggests that provincial elites may have done the same in other parts of the empire, although she admits that the evidence is far from conclusive.³³² The estimation that wealthier Christians seem to have tended predominantly to spend money

³²⁷ R. Jensen, 'Dining with the Dead' (2008), 107.

³²⁸ There is a whole subchapter dedicated to the changes under Pope Damasus, in: V. Fiocchi-Nicolai, F. Bisconti, D. Mazzoleni, *The Christian Catacombs of Rome* (2002²), 49-59.

³²⁹ L. Spera, 'Interventi di papa Damaso nei santuari delle catacombe romane' (1994).

³³⁰ Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 9.2 (PG 67:1597A-1601C).

³³¹ Claudian, *In Rufinum* 2.446-53 (Barrie-Hall (ed.), 1985, 48); Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 8.17 (PG 67:1560A-B); Callinicus, *Vita Hypatii* 8.1-7 (SC 177:96-100); cf. A. Samellas, *Death in the Eastern Mediterranean* (2002), 235.

³³² K. Bowes, *Private Worship, Public Values* (2008), 148.

on their own family graves and on the tombs of the martyrs at the same time is not far from the truth.³³³

Such was the case with the *mausoleum* set near the villa of La Alberca (Murcia) in southern Hispania.³³⁴ (Figure 60) Bowes supposes that the mausoleum there may have been designed straight to copy an existing martyr shrine. The two-storey structure, bristling with buttresses, tries to imitate the more famous *martyrium* in Marusinac near Salona in Dalmatia.³³⁵ (Figure 61)

There, the martyr's remains were laid in the crypt apse, while private, family graves were placed in the main crypt chamber. Kim Bowes puts the question:

By the later 4th or early 5th century when the La Alberca mausoleum was constructed, the Dalmatian martyr shrine had become an important site of veneration: could this Spanish aristocrat have built his or her own mausoleum to evoke it?³³⁶

This example is even more interesting because of the resemblance between the *mausolea* at Marusinac and La Alberca with the so called Early Christian Mausoleum in Sopianae in their shape, structure and size.³³⁷ (Figure 40) It is arguable that as the mimic of the same building was similar as was the intention behind it, too.

The pictorial representation of the same design which is to be accompanied by saints can be found in some wall paintings of Roman catacombs. The company of martyrs or saints was intended to suggest their support of the deceased, to represent the paradisiacal atmosphere which they share and to shatter the limit between heaven and earth.³³⁸ In the famous fresco of an *arcosolium* at the Catacomb of Domitilla, the martyr Petronilla introduces the deceased aristocrat Veneranda into the garden of Paradise.³³⁹ (Figure 64) In the Catacomb of Commodilla, in the *Cubiculum Leonis*, martyrs Felix and Adactus are located on the two prominent sides of

³³³ Julia Hillner argued that lay patrons of titular churches in Rome had a similar double intention at the end of the fourth century. They willingly conferred wealth to the church, but sought to maintain some control over the churches they had endowed by various means. [J. Hillner, 'Families, patronage, and the titular churches of Rome' (2007)].

³³⁴ T. Hauschild, 'Das Martyrium von La Alberca' (1971); H. Schlunk, T. Hauschild, *Hispania Antiqua* (1996), 112; K. Bowes, *Private Worship, Public Values* (2008), 142.

³³⁵ E. Dyggve, R. Egger, *Der altchristliche Friedhof Marusinac* (1939).

³³⁶ K. Bowes, *Private Worship, Public Values* (2008), 142.

³³⁷ F. Fülep, 'A pécsi ókeresztény mauzóleum ásatása' ['Excavations of the Early Christian Mausoleum of Pécs'] (1977).

³³⁸ V. Ficocchi-Nicolai, F. Bisconti, D. Mazzoleni, *The Christian Catacombs of Rome* (2002²), 129.

³³⁹ U. M. Fasola B., *The Catacombs of Domitilla* (2002), 41-3.

the painted *tabula inscriptionis*.³⁴⁰ In the cubiculum in the cemetery of SS Peter and Marcellinus on Via Labicana, four venerated martyrs are arranged around a lamb at the base of a pyramid with Christ between the apostles Peter and Paul at the summit.³⁴¹ (This last image will be used later as a parallel to the iconography of the SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber in Sopianae, cf. Chapter 5.4.2 and Figure 71.)

5.2. Some Remarks on the Cults of Martyrs

The veneration of martyrs became widespread in Christian communities all over the world from the late fourth century onwards. Just as 'pagan' heroes³⁴² were honoured in the cult of that family or group they belonged to, in the same way, the context of the cult of Christian martyrs was the 'family', too, but in a peculiar Christian sense.³⁴³ The believers constituted a 'family' in which they were connected to one another in brotherhood. Thus, although the veneration of martyrs shows similarities to 'pagan' hero or ancestor worship in Antiquity, its scope was more extensive than that of the 'pagan' cult of heroes.³⁴⁴

The main substance of the martyr cult was that their honour grants a channel of communication between the believer and God. It was believed by Christians that the martyrs, as true witnesses to their faith, were rewarded with paradisiacal happiness and being in God's presence forever. They are actually alive, not dead at all and therefore, they have the capacity of interceding on behalf of their 'brothers and sisters'.³⁴⁵

5.2.1. *The cult of martyrs in Rome in the fourth century*

Emperor Constantine the Great (306-337) started constructions in Rome on a monumental level.³⁴⁶ He commissioned the construction of such classical public

³⁴⁰ A. Nestori, *Repertorio topografico delle pitture delle catacombe romane* (1975), 142-3.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 50.

³⁴² W. Speyer, 'Heros' (1988).

³⁴³ Th. Baumeister, 'Heiligenverehrung I' (1988).

³⁴⁴ A. Mentzos, 'Death and rebirth' (2011), 48.

³⁴⁵ Cf. *ibid.*

³⁴⁶ J. Vogt, 'Constantinus der Große' (1957).

buildings in the inner city from public funds, as his own triumphal arch next to the Colosseum, the arch of Ianus on the *Forum Boarium*, the *Basilica Nova* on the Forum and his baths on the Quirinal Hill. At the same time, Christian basilicas were built on the emperor's private grounds outside the city from private funding. Commemorative buildings (*memoriae*) were erected above the graves of St Peter, St Paul, St Lawrence, St Sebastian, SS Peter and Marcellinus and St Agnes in the suburbs of Rome. The series of these new Christian basilicas and mausolea encompassed the city like a ring.³⁴⁷ These constructs were private buildings (*res privata*) and they did not only commemorate the martyrs but also provided resting place for the members of the imperial family.

The Constantinian buildings commemorating the Roman martyrs show a peculiarity. They were built outside the city, as cemeteries at the time were located outside the city walls in harmony with Roman law.³⁴⁸ Since Constantine wished to provide honourable resting place for the members of his family, he appointed graves to them *ad sanctos*, i.e. in the very closeness to the martyrs' tombs. But why were these buildings built directly above the tombs of the martyrs even if the location was less suitable for the construction in some cases? It has been suggested that the Roman church and therefore also Constantine adhered to the original resting places because the integrity of the graves was sacrosanct.³⁴⁹ The *lex dedicationis*, which secured the temples of the gods, also prohibited the sacrilege of tombs.³⁵⁰

The cult of the martyrs and their relics differed from their contemporaneous cult in the Eastern part of the Roman Empire in this respect. There, the relics of the martyrs were taken out from the graves and removed without concern. The purpose of the *translatio* of the relics was donation to distant places in many cases. However, the disturbance and relocation of corpses seem to have been out of question in Rome. Since in Roman law and religion, the grave and the temple were equally *res sacra*, Constantine was able to connect and transform them into a single construct. However, as it will be demonstrated later on in this chapter, this concern

³⁴⁷ P.-A. Février, 'Permanences et héritages de l'antiquité dans la topographie des villes de l'Occident durant le haut Moyen-Age' (1974), 65-6..

³⁴⁸ '*hominem mortuum in urbe ne sepelito neve urito*' (c. 450 BC) (*Law of the Twelve Tables*, X. 1; cf. Cicero, *De legibus* 2.58)

³⁴⁹ H. Delehay, *Les origines du culte des martyrs* (1933), 48.

³⁵⁰ É. Rebillard, 'Violation de sépulture et impiété dans l'antiquité tardive' (2002).

with the translation of the relics was passing away and the attitude towards the relics of the martyrs changed in the Western region of the church after Constantine in the fourth century.

Before Constantine, there were no particular buildings commemorating martyrs. The cult of the martyrs had been a phenomenon of spiritual reverence rather than honouring their burial places with special constructs. Martyrs' tombs were to be found among other graves, even in the vicinity of non-Christian graves. They were not buried separately in special Christian cemeteries since such cemeteries did not exist in those days at all. The archaeological evidence attesting cemeteries shared by Christians and non-Christians is overwhelming. It seems irrefutable that Christians and 'pagans' were buried in the same places throughout the fourth century, if not beyond.³⁵¹ É. Rebillard gave good evince that religion had little bearing on the choice of a burial place in Late Antiquity. He states that

[...] Christians, like other religious groups, did not have religious reasons for favoring some form of communal burial over family burial. Funerary practices and, specifically, the choice of burial place does not appear to have been, in the Roman Empire, an important element in the constructing of religious identity.³⁵²

Constantine's diligence to promote the veneration of the martyrs by erecting basilicas above their graves and family mausolea next to them did not have antecedents in Christian tradition. J. Guyon appositely asserted that martyrs did not cause the construction of basilicas but those Constantinian basilicas created the cult of martyrs.³⁵³ Constantine wanted the heroes of Christians to receive a similar public veneration as other well-known heroes, thus he chose the traditional way of the honour: to raise monumental buildings above their tombs. Therefore, these buildings and the commemoration of the martyrs in them was not a linear development inside Christianity, but rather another example for the mutual exchanges and manifold correlations in the late Roman society.

³⁵¹ M. Johnson, 'Pagan-Christian Burial Practices of the Fourth Century' (1997), 59.

³⁵² É. Rebillard, *The Care of the Dead in Late Antiquity* (2009), 36.

³⁵³ J. Guyon, *Le cimetière aux deux lauriers* (1987), 325.

Although the martyrs' memorial was documented and preserved in martyr acts in Rome,³⁵⁴ the first evidence of their special commemoration or cult originates only from the end of the third century.³⁵⁵ The regular visitation of the holy graves is attested by Jerome when at the age of 80, he recalls his student life in Rome in the 360s and mentions his and his fellow students' practice to pay a visit to the graves of the apostles and martyrs on Sundays. He writes:

*When I was a boy at Rome and was being educated in liberal studies, I was accustomed to visit on Sundays the sepulchres of the apostles and martyrs accompanied by others with similar age and interest. And often did I enter the crypts, deep dug in the earth, with their walls on either side lined with the bodies of the dead, where everything is so dark that it almost seems as if the psalmist's words were fulfilled: Let them go down alive into hell (Ps. 55.15). (Jerome, *Commentarii in Hezechielem*, 12.243-9)³⁵⁶*

It cannot be excluded that this reminiscence was influenced by the later development in the cult of Roman martyrs that Jerome experienced during his lifetime.

In the second half of the fourth century, Christianity gained a public status for itself in Rome and the sacred places in the city went through a significant development. It was during the pontificate of Pope Damasus I (366-384) that Rome achieved a special Christian character. This was manifested in greater exposure of Christian imagery and objects in the city, i.e. the confirmation of the papal authority and organization of the cult of saints. In this period, the Roman church was getting isolated from the Constantinian conception of the church and attempted to have its primacy recognized on a Petrine basis among the churches and before the emperor. Pope Damasus could achieve noteworthy results in this area not without the arrangement of the network of local 'holy places' which formed Rome to be the '*Urbs sancta*' (the holy City).

During the pontificate of Damasus, an inventory was drawn up to find the location of the graves of the martyrs.³⁵⁷ Before that time, 'martyrial graves did not generally differ (in terms of physical appearance) from the other graves that could

³⁵⁴ H. Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (1972).

³⁵⁵ G. Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome* (1995).

³⁵⁶ CCSL 75, 556-7; trans. J. Stevenson, in *The Catacombs* (1978), 24.

³⁵⁷ The bibliography relating to Pope Damasus is copious. There is a comprehensive overview of his pontificate: *Saecularia Damasiana. Atti del convegno internazionale per il XVI centenario della morte di papa Damaso I* (1986).

be found in the catacombs.³⁵⁸ The research ordered by Damasus proved to be successful, since while the catalogue from the time of Pope Liberius (352-366) (*Catalogus Liberianus*), also called *Depositio Martyrum*,³⁵⁹ numerated 46 Roman martyrs and bishops in the year of 354, the *Martyrologium Hieronymianum* in the fifth century catalogued more than 150.³⁶⁰

The invigorating effect on the martyrs' cult caused by Damasus' activity can be detected through the new wave of constructions all over in the Roman catacombs.³⁶¹ This was brought about by the increasing number of visitors who arrived in larger groups particularly at the tombs of the martyrs.³⁶² Considerable shafts were constructed to bring down air and light into the subterranean galleries of the catacombs. Since visitors demanded not only an opportunity to pray at these sites, but also the opportunity for physical contact, the rooms that housed the venerated tombs were enlarged. New staircases were also constructed to adjust to the increased demands and at the same time, to facilitate a better flow of pilgrims orientating them in only one direction.³⁶³ This system of 'one-way traffic' is called *gradus ascensionis et descensionis* as the poet Prudentius mentioned it in the early fifth century when writing about visits to the tomb of the martyr Hippolytus on Via Tiburtina.³⁶⁴

Pope Damasus highlighted the significance of the martyrs by his commemorative poems. These metrical inscriptions were engraved into large marble slabs in superb capital letters by the calligrapher Furius Dionysius Philocalus and were placed onto the walls of the catacombs into which the tombs were cut. In some cases, columns or smaller pilasters that supported arches and architraves were added to accomplish the composition by constructing a framework around the large

³⁵⁸ L. V. Rutgers, *Subterranean Rome* (2000), 77.

³⁵⁹ *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, tomus 9: *Chronica Minora Saec. IV-VII* (1892), 73-6; M. Salzman, *On Roman Time* (1990), 46; cf. V. Fiocchi-Nicolai, 'Cubiculario' (1983).

³⁶⁰ PL 30, 433-86; G. B. de Rossi, L. Duchesne (eds), *Martyrologium Hieronymianum* (1894); H. Delehay, *Commentarius perpetuus in Martyrologium Hieronymianum* (1931).

³⁶¹ V. Fiocchi-Nicolai, 'Itinera ad Sanctos' (1995), 763-5.

³⁶² One of the Damasian inscriptions, the epitaph to the martyrs Felix and Adauctus suggests a wide-ranging monumentalization due to Damasus saying that Damasus '*composuit tumulum, sanctorum limina adornans*' (Damasus, *Epigrammata* 7).

³⁶³ L. V. Rutgers, *Subterranean Rome* (2000), 79-80.

³⁶⁴ '*eunt, redeunt solis ad usque obitum*' Prudentius, *Peristephanon*, 11.190 (in H. J. Thomson ed. and trans., *Prudentius*, (1961-1962), 317).

marble plaque.³⁶⁵ During the excavations, one marble slab was found unbroken and also several fragments of about eighty others in the catacombs.³⁶⁶

The significance of the Damasian inscriptions is equally outstanding from archaeological, historical and hagiographical points of view. They designated the resting place of the martyrs exactly, sanctioning the tradition with papal authority. They also served as worthy memorial monuments for the martyrs and a palpable site for the cult to be enhanced. Thirdly, the poems provided spiritual content to the visitors and consequently, created the ideological background of the cult.

The promotion of the cult of the martyrs by Damasus did not remain an isolated initiation. The positive attitude towards the martyrs and the intensifying appreciation of their resting places were well echoed among the members of the Roman church. The practice of burials *ad sanctos* that had already occurred in a moderate form in the earlier periods became more frequent during the pontificate of Damasus.³⁶⁷ There were several wealthier lay people who were not only involved in the construction of urban cult buildings through generous donations, but also commissioned monumental tombs in the privileged vicinity of the graves of martyrs.³⁶⁸ For example, in the catacomb of Domitilla three new regions were designated in the neighbourhood of the tomb of SS Nereus and Achilleus. Or the rather simple funerary area at the Catacomb of Commodilla grew into a cemetery with a significant size after the invention of the tomb of two local martyrs, Felix and Adauctus due to the activity of pope Damasus. These developments are attested by the funerary inscriptions available in the particular areas of the catacombs and by the decoration of the *loculi* and *cubicula*.³⁶⁹

There were other sites where the topography of the catacomb provided space for new burials behind the tomb of the venerated martyr. Thus, galleries or cubicula were composed *retro sanctos* in some cases. These new constructions were inserted into the existing system of the catacomb. This happened behind the so-called Crypt of the Popes in the Catacomb of Callistus, behind the tomb of SS

³⁶⁵ V. Fiocchi-Nicolai, F. Bisconti, D. Mazzoleni, *The Christian Catacombs of Rome* (2002²), 50-1.

³⁶⁶ L. V. Rutgers, *Subterranean Rome* (2000), 78.

³⁶⁷ L. Spera, 'Interventi di papa Damaso nei santuari delle catacombe romane' (1994).

³⁶⁸ V. Fiocchi-Nicolai, F. Bisconti, D. Mazzoleni, *The Christian Catacombs of Rome*, (2002²), 52-3.

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 54.

Felix and Adautus in the aforementioned Catacomb of Commodilla, of St Callistus in the Catacomb of Calepodius, of St Alexander in the cemetery of Giordani and in the central region of the Catacomb of SS Mark, Marcellianus and Damasus. The decoration of the *retro sanctos* burial places with marble, mosaics or *opus sectile* clearly shows that they must have been owned by well-to-do people.³⁷⁰

5.2.2. Other fourth-century evidence outside of Rome

Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335 – c. 395), as bishop, supported the tradition of the cult of the martyrs. His witness can assist the better understanding of the question of the cult of the martyrs in the second half of the fourth century when the cemetery buildings in Sopianae were built and can enlighten the contemporaneous attitude towards the martyrs. Gregory had a special devotion to the martyrs as is seen in six sermons composed in their honour.³⁷¹ Besides two sermons on St Stephen the Protomartyr,³⁷² three sermons were devoted to the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste³⁷³ (*Mart. Ia, Ib and II*), and the sixth is a panegyric to Theodore the Martyr.³⁷⁴ In his second sermon on the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste, he asserts that ‘the martyrs are still alive and of great benefit for the Church, in the past, the present and the future.’³⁷⁵

Gregory says:

*I have mentioned this for the purpose of strengthening our faith because the martyrs are alive; they are our bodyguards and companions who even today serve and adorn the Church.*³⁷⁶

Gregory also stresses the importance of the intercession of martyrs in his panegyric on Theodore the Recruit when he states:

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 56.

³⁷¹ “*Let us die that we may live*”, J. Leemans, W. Mayer, P. Allen, B. Demandschutter (eds) (2003); J. Leemans, ‘Style and Meaning’ (2005).

³⁷² *In Sanctum Stephanum I et II*, O. Lendle (ed.), (1990); “*Let us die that we may live*”, (2003), 80.

³⁷³ The Forty Martyrs of Sebaste were among the most popular Christian saints of late Antiquity. The earliest surviving documents are the homily by Basil of Caesarea (PG 31.507–526), the three homilies by Gregory of Nyssa and an anonymous *Passio XL Martyrum* (O. von Gebhardt (ed.), *Acta martyrum selecta* (1903), 171–81.

³⁷⁴ Saint Theodore of Amasea, also known as Theodore the Recruit, was martyred in the early 4th century. Gregory of Nyssa’s sermon in February 381 is the earliest source for any information about him. (J. Bernardi, *La prédication des Pères Cappadociens* (1968), 303).

³⁷⁵ Johan Leeman, ‘In XL Martyres II’, in L. Mateo-Seco, G. Maspero (eds), *The Brill Dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa* (2010), 487.

³⁷⁶ Gregory of Nyssa, *In XL Martyres II* (W. Jaeger (gen. ed.), *Gregorii Nysseni Opera* (1990), 166).

*In this way one implores the martyr who intercedes on our behalf and is an attendant of God for imparting those favours and blessings which people seek.*³⁷⁷

The belief in the martyrs being alive has another consequence. Their relics were not classified among the remains of ordinary dead people. For that reason, relics of martyrs were not associated with impurity, but they were expected to bring blessings to the living.³⁷⁸

Gregory of Nyssa makes a clear distinction between the martyr's body, which should be treated with great honour, and the corpse of any other person, which gives rise to disrelish. With this distinction, Gregory creates an emphasis to the special status of the martyrs' tombs. According to him, nobody likes the proximity of ordinary tombs, whereas *in the place in which our meeting is held and the martyr is celebrated [...] the people are happy about the impressiveness of the things they see.*³⁷⁹

There was a *martyrion* to the aforementioned forty soldier martyrs at Gregory's family estate at Annisa, where an urn of their ashes was kept. Gregory's parents and his sister, Macrina were buried there, in a common grave next to the relics.³⁸⁰ Gregory proudly proclaims that they will benefit from the proximity of the martyrs at the resurrection of the dead. He says: *In this way they will rise at the resurrection with those who are filled with greater confidence.*³⁸¹

As Gregory's example shows, martyr cults gained wide-spread popularity among Christians. It was further popularised by a narrative that was easily acceptable even by the simplest of the faithful. This narrative was being formed around the martyrs: they had the courage to face persecution, became champions, earned salvation and power by which they answer to the needs of others in this life on earth.³⁸²

³⁷⁷ Gregory of Nyssa, *De sancto Theodoro martyre* (PG 46:737b–c; *idem*: J. Cavarnos (trans.), W. Jaeger (gen. ed.), *Gregorii Nysseni Opera* (1990), 61–71).

³⁷⁸ J. Harries, 'Death and the dead in the late Roman West' (1992), 59.

³⁷⁹ Gregory of Nyssa, *De sancto Theodoro martyre* (PG 46: 737b–c.)

³⁸⁰ Gregory of Nyssa, *Vita Sanctae Macrinae*, 37.1 (W. Jaeger (gen. ed.), *Gregorii Nysseni Opera* (1986), 409; P. Maraval, *Grégoire de Nysse: Lettres* (1990), 254–6.

³⁸¹ Gregory of Nyssa, *In XL Martyres II*, 166.

³⁸² R. MacMullen, *The Second Church* (2009), 50.

Thus, though the church was not involved in the execution of Christian burials, the hierarchy showed more interest in managing and controlling the martyrs' tombs and their cult.³⁸³ The idea that supposes reciprocity between Christians living and dead and in this way, implies both the duty of the living to pray for the dead and the martyrs to intercede for the living, was only in formation during the fourth century. The archaeological studies cannot provide as strong an evidence as it might be expected on the basis of the literary sources and as it has been suggested by theological speculations whereby the idea of reciprocity was part of the essence of early Christianity.³⁸⁴

Originally, a martyr's home town or the place where he suffered martyrdom claimed to have his *martyrium* in a natural way. However, the growing importance of the martyrs and their cult during the fourth century led to the custom of 'translating' their relics. It meant that a part of their remains were removed from their tombs to another place or places. (It is quite strange, that larger number of people were able to meet a martyr through the relics which represented the 'whole' martyr, but only when the relics were fragmented and dispersed.) The personal presence (*praesentia*) of the particular saint and through it, his or her special interest and protection was ensured if a city or an individual could possess any of his or her relics.³⁸⁵ As Prudentius wrote of Eulalia of Merida in his poem:

*sic venerarier ossa libet
ossibus altar et inpositum:
ilia Dei sita sub pedibus
prospicit haec populosque suos
carmine propitiata foveat.*

(So will we venerate her bones
and the altar placed over her bones, while she,
set at the feet of God, views all our doings,
our song wins her favour,
and she cherishes her people.)³⁸⁶

³⁸³ É. Rebillard, *The Care of the Dead in Late Antiquity* (2009), 177.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁵ J. Harries, 'Death and the dead in the late Roman West' (1992), 59.

³⁸⁶ Prudentius, *Peristephanon*, 3.211-15 (in H. J. Thomson (ed. and trans.), *Prudentius* (1961-1962), 155-6).

The migration of relics made it possible to build *martyria* in such places that had not had any connection with the saint's life. 'Particularly significant is the case of Constantinople which, at the time of its foundation, had practically no previous Christian associations, but which, with the passage of time, acquired the greatest collection of relics in all Christendom.'³⁸⁷

The translation of relics was primarily promoted and organised by the members of the hierarchy. In 386, Ambrose bishop of Milan dedicated the *Basilica Apostolorum* (today known as San Nazaro in Brolo) in the cemetery outside the city walls, before the Porta Romana, with relics of St Andrew, St Thomas, and St John the Evangelist. These relics were brought to Milan from elsewhere.³⁸⁸ (Figure 65)

Soon afterwards, Ambrose was also asked by the local congregation to consecrate a new basilica which was built in the *coemeterium ad martyres*, not far from Porta Vercelliana. Ambrose's answer to his sister Marcellina evidences that his condition was the presence of martyr relics there. He wrote: '*faciam si martyrum reliquias invenero*'.³⁸⁹ And indeed, Ambrose himself provided the new church with relics. After he found the relics of two Milanese martyrs, Protasius and Gervasius in the shrine of SS Felix and Nabor, they were unearthed and translated in solemn procession to the new church, the *Basilica Ambrosiana* (also known as *Basilica Martyrum*), where he placed them beneath the altar.³⁹⁰ (Figure 66 and Figure 67)

It is useful to note the difference between the two stories from Ambrose's life concerning relics.³⁹¹ In the first case, relics of apostles were placed in the basilica, while the second case was about the invention of the relics of some local martyrs. So it looks that the relics of the apostles were not satisfying. The invention of Gervasius and Protasius can be understood as the wish of Ambrose and his flock to be 'the descendants, not of martyrs in general, but of their own martyrs.'³⁹²

The ancient Milanese church longed for special, local patrons; they required possession of relics of their own. Ambrose himself used the word 'patron' to de-

³⁸⁷ C. Mango, *The art of the Byzantine empire* (1972), 21.

³⁸⁸ G. Noga-Banai, *The trophies of the martyrs* (2008), 131.

³⁸⁹ Ambrose, *Epistulae* 22.1 (CSEL 82/3, M. Zelzer (ed.) (1982), 127-8).

³⁹⁰ *Ep.* 22.1-2.

³⁹¹ Ambrose's positive attitude towards the relics is also attested by the burial of his brother Satyrus in the chapel of S. Vittore in Ciel d'Oro (*Basilica Ambrosiana*). He placed the body next to the relics of St Victor in the crypt, beneath the altar. (See Ambrose, *De excessu Fratris sui Satyri*, PL 16.1289-354).

³⁹² R. A. Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity* (1990), 144.

scribe the martyr in this context in his above mentioned letter to Marcellina.³⁹³ This example can demonstrate the rise of the cult of the local martyrs within the church in the second half of the fourth century and their exceptional relevance to the local community.

The metal boxes from this period, which contained those relics, also provide good evidence for the custom of the translation of martyr relics.³⁹⁴ The earliest caskets were placed within the churches under the altar as it has been seen in the two examples from Milan. This replacement of the relics under the altar, on which Christ's sacrifice is celebrated, introduced the martyrs' cult from tombs and shrines into the inner space of the cemetery basilicas and in this way, incorporated it into the sacramental and liturgical practice performed within the church's walls.

These precious caskets served not only as reliquaries but were also suitable for being used as generous gifts allowing the shipment of the relics. Ambrose did not beware of the distribution of relics to other churches in the west, either, although disinterring relics and translating them was forbidden by two imperial rulings issued at Constantinople. Among others, Ambrose donated relics to Paulinus of Nola, Gaudentius of Brescia, Victricius of Rouen and possibly Martin of Tours.³⁹⁵ The exchanges of holy relics signify a chain of influential people simultaneously promoting the cult.³⁹⁶

However, there are also examples where funerary sites are the expression of the laity's religion and piety. A good number of sites suggest (although not with conclusive evidence) that particularly suburban and provincial elites tended to furnish their mausolea with relics.³⁹⁷ One of these was the deaconess Eusebia, in whose villa-mausoleum the relics of the above mentioned Forty Martyrs were placed over her casket.³⁹⁸ At the Marusinac cemetery in Dalmatia, the pious Asclepia had a memorial church built for herself. It served as a memorial to the martyr

³⁹³ Ambrose, *Ep.* 22. 10: *patrocinia* (CSEL 82/3, 132. 101), and 22.11: *patroni* (133. 119-20).

³⁹⁴ A particular study of such caskets is available in G. Noga-Banai's book, *The trophies of the martyrs* (2008).

³⁹⁵ E. D. Hunt, 'The Traffic of Relics' (1981), 171-9.

³⁹⁶ According to G. Noga-Banai, the casket of S. Nazaro (from Milan), of Africana (possibly from Campania) and the Brivio Casket (from North Italy-Gaul) were possibly used in the exchange of the relics on the basis of their date and place of origin. (*The trophies of the martyrs* (2008), 134).

³⁹⁷ K. Bowes, *Private Worship, Public Values* (2008), 142.

³⁹⁸ Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 9.2 (PG 67.1597A-1601C).

Anastasius and as a burial place for the family as well.³⁹⁹ (This mausoleum will be analysed in more detail subsequently because of its connections to Sopianae.) Another example is the prefect Rufinus' villa-Apostoleion complex at Chalcedon, mentioned earlier in Chapter 5.1.3, completed in 394. Rufinus built a great *martyrium* to the apostles Peter and Paul adjacent to his villa. He had brought the relics of the two apostles from Rome some five years previously. Rufinus built his own mausoleum attached or beside the *martyrium*.⁴⁰⁰

5.2.3. *The martyria: places for the commemoration of martyrs*

The tradition of building *mausolea* over the tombs of wealthy or important people was neither a new nor a specifically Christian idea, but already had a long tradition all over the Roman Empire.⁴⁰¹ The origins of the commemoration of the martyrs go back to Hellenized Judaism.⁴⁰² There is a group of martyrs who are known as the Maccabean Martyrs or Holy Maccabees, although they are not said to be of the Maccabee family. They are so named from the description of their martyrdom in the *Second* and *Fourth Books of Maccabees*. They are seven Jewish brothers, their mother and their teacher, who were all executed during the reign of Antiochus IV Epiphanes about 168-166 BC.⁴⁰³ The relics of these nine people were kept and venerated in a special Jewish grave building in Antioch.⁴⁰⁴

A Christian church was erected on the ruins of this building at the end of the fourth century. There are three early Christian homilies which were engaged with these martyrs: Gregory of Nazianzus' *In Machabaeorum laudem* (preached in 362), John Chrysostom's *De Eleazaro et septem pueris* (preached in 398 or 399), and

³⁹⁹ E. Dyggve, R. Egger, *Der altchristliche Friedhof Marusinac* (1939).

⁴⁰⁰ Claudian, *In Rufinum* 2.446-53 (J. B. Hall (ed.), *Claudii Claudiani Carmina* (1985), 48); Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 8.17 (PG 67.1560A-B); Callinicus, *Vita Hypatii* 8.1-7 (SC 177.96-100)

⁴⁰¹ G. Mackie, *Early Christian Chapels in the West* (2003), 11.

⁴⁰² C. Marksches, *Das antike Christentum* (2012²), 119.

⁴⁰³ 2 *Maccabees* 6:18 – 7:42.

⁴⁰⁴ J. Jeremias, *Heiligengräber in Jesu Umwelt* (1958), 22. However, there is a disagreement whether there was a real Jewish cult of the Maccabean martyrs before their Christian cult. M. Schatkin and R. Wilken assume this to be true. In contrast, L. V. Rutgers considers the possibility of a Jewish cult to be 'very remote', and G. Rouwhorst agrees with him. M. Schatkin, 'The Maccabean Martyrs' (1974); R. L. Wilken, *John Chrysostom and the Jews* (1983), 88; L. V. Rutgers, 'The Importance of Scripture in the Conflict Between Jews and Christians' (1998); G. Rouwhorst, 'The Cult of the Seven Maccabean Brothers and their Mother in Christian Tradition' (2004); M. Petrin, 'Justifying the Christian Cult of the Maccabean Martyrs' (2009).

Augustine of Hippo's *In solemnitate martyrum Machabaeorum* (preached sometime between 391 and 430). An anonym person from Piacenza who came as a pilgrim to Palestine in about 570 also mentions that he saw the nine tombs and the torturing tools hanging above each one of them.⁴⁰⁵

The commemoration of martyrs principally took place in the site of their martyrdom or their burial. These places were regarded as sacred (*locus sanctus*) and became the prime locality of the martyr cult. The earliest shrines marking the martyrs' graves were small memorial chapels, *cellae memoriae*. The development around the martyrs' graves followed a common pattern. In the first stage, the main function of the *cellae memoriae* was to shelter the gravesites. Later, they gradually became focal points for the piety of Christians, who wished to have burial places near the saints. These tombs usually formed a cluster around the martyrs' tombs. In some cases, the memorial chapels were enlarged to comply with the greater number of such demands. As a final point, it seems that burial beside the saints became a privilege reserved for archbishops, bishops and the wealthiest stratum of laity.⁴⁰⁶

The annual feast day of the martyrs (the anniversary of their martyrdom or death) was normally celebrated by the Christian community at these shrines. The celebration included the official recitation of relevant texts, i.e. the records of the martyrs' trials and the accounts of the martyrdom (*martyria*), prayers, libations, and celebration of the Eucharist.⁴⁰⁷ The celebration of the Eucharist over the tombs had its origin in the *refrigerium*, the practice of celebrating a commemorative meal in memory of the dead. It was a later stage of development when altars were erected next to martyr tombs. The presence of an altar inside a shrine indicates that a Eucharist could be held there.⁴⁰⁸

The space around the tomb is often furnished in such a way that allows for the performance of the funerary and commemorative rites. On the cover slab of the tombs of martyrs (or of other prominent people) libation holes can be seen for the pouring of liquid offerings. Portable wooden or permanent stone benches were placed, usually in the form of the Greek letter *pi* (Π), for the visitors around the

⁴⁰⁵ *Itinera Hierosolymitana saeculi III-VI* (CSEL 39, P. Geyer (ed.) (1898), 159-91).

⁴⁰⁶ G. Mackie, *Early Christian Chapels in the West* (2003), 11.

⁴⁰⁷ A. Mentzos, 'Death and rebirth,' 48.

⁴⁰⁸ R. Jensen, 'Dining with the Dead' (2008), 132.

tomb. These *mensae* and couches were used both in private funeral banquets and the saints' public feasts. In the latter cases, there is typically an apse or arched niche opposite the entrance, for ritual use.⁴⁰⁹

There was a custom in the funerary architecture of Late Antiquity to connect the subterranean tomb of a hero with the ground-level ritual space. N. Kylls' defines this type of building as having three distinct features: an entrance at ground level, an accessible hypogeum and a two-storey structure⁴¹⁰. This structure contains an underground vaulted crypt and a ground-floor room ('*cella memoriae*'⁴¹¹). (In Pécs, the remains of this structure are still visible in the case of the Burial Chamber with the Jar. Figure 28)

Three types of these memorial buildings can be distinguished.⁴¹²

1. Under the influence of non-Christian practice, above-ground structures were built over the tombs of the martyrs in the Roman catacombs. These structures provided space for the cultic veneration in the form of a canopy or baldachin. The later tradition and archaeological findings give evidence for this category of *martyria*.

2. The funerary church or the church of the martyr is specific to the Balkan Peninsula and particularly to the province of Illyricum. In this category, there are basilica-style buildings with a narthex and atrium. They were erected in the second half of the fourth century. They were built above the possibly undisturbed tombs of the martyrs. Afterwards, normal tombs were placed inside and around the exterior walls of the building and subsequently the church became the centre of the cemetery. Typical examples are the two cemetery basilicas of Corinth, the *extra muros* basilica at Philippi, the Ilissos basilica in Athens, the basilica on Tritis Septembriou Street in Thessaloniki, or the single-nave basilica at Ivanjane in Bulgaria.

3. There is another group of Christian *martyria* which takes its form from the architectural types of Roman mausolea. Two subtypes can be distinguished: cruciform and centrally planned.

⁴⁰⁹ A. Mentzos, 'Death and rebirth' (2011), 49.

⁴¹⁰ N. Kyll, *Tod, Grab, Begräbnisplatz, Totenfeier* (1972), 176.

⁴¹¹ S. Tatz, '*Cella memoriae*' (2011).

⁴¹² A. Mentzos, 'Death and rebirth' (2011), 49-51.

a. Cruciform *martyria* are also called *cellae trichorae*, since they are funerary buildings with three apses in a clover shape.⁴¹³ Their size is usually restricted. If a cruciform *martyrium* is attached to a church, the burials in the ‘cloverleaves’ can be regarded *ad sanctos*.

A well-known monument of this category is the mausoleum of Galla Placidia in Ravenna. In the cemetery of Sopianae, there are two buildings of this type, both individually standing *cella trichora*. One of them is a one-storey, over-ground building unearthed in 1922.⁴¹⁴ (Figure 46 and Figure 47)

The other *cella trichora* was excavated in 2011. It is a two-storey building whose upper, above-ground structure was built onto the walls of the underground part.⁴¹⁵ (Figure 48)

b. Centrally planned cemetery *martyria* form the other subcategory. Although their size is typically more monumental, these structures are quite simple. They were not necessarily built in the honour of martyrs. They might have served the mere purpose of burials in well-to-do families.

Among these *mausolea*, there are some which imitate banquet halls. Their architectural plan is centrally arranged and they are typically large, multilobed buildings. They have a symbolic character, as they allude to the heavenly banquet in the afterlife. Buildings of this type can be found for example in Philippopolis (Plovdiv, Bulgaria), a *martyrion* in the Western cemetery of Thessaloniki (Greece), the Hagioi Saranda of Epirus Vetus (Sarandë, southern Albania), St. Gereon’s Church in Colonia Agrippina (Cologne, Germany) (Figure 68) and the Cella Septichora⁴¹⁶ in Sopianae (Figure 49).

5.2.4. Conclusion

The cult of the martyrs and their relics seems to be an appropriate answer for the challenges of the church in the second half of the fourth century. Only after the

⁴¹³ F. W. Deichmann, ‘Cella trichora’ (1954).

⁴¹⁴ F. Fülep, *Sopianae* (1984), 51-3. 296-301; K. Hudák, L. Nagy, *A Fine and Private Place* (2009), 73-6.

⁴¹⁵ Z. Tóth, C. Pozsárkó, ‘Újabb ókeresztény sírkápolna Sopianae-ből’ [Another burial chapel from Sopianae] (2012); Z. Tóth, ‘Hány „sírkamrát” rejt a föld Sopianae északi temetőjében?’ [How many burial chambers are hidden in the northern cemetery of Sopianae?] (2012).

⁴¹⁶ C. Pozsárkó, I. Z. Tóth, Z. Visy, ‘Sopianae: a cella septichora és környéke’ [Sopianae: the Cella Septichora and its Neighbourhood] (2007); K. Hudák, L. Nagy, *A Fine and Private Place* (2009), 27-9.

church did not face persecutions any longer, the martyrs' cult achieved a palpable and physical connection to the past through the construction of *martyria* and the regular visits to them. All this was based on the idea that the presence of the martyrs was possible in their remains, and the conviction that the fragments represented the whole. Therefore, the martyrs could fulfil their role as intercessors and advocates through the effectiveness of their relics in a great number of places. This patronage was believed to be effectual on an increased level in the correlation of local saints and the faithful.

Besides, the cult of martyrs had the potential to increase the number of church attenders and their loyalty to it. Martyrs were to create models of imitation for Christians. Moreover, the cult served the purposes of those who were in authority in the church. This has become evident especially through the examples of Pope Damasus and Bishop Ambrose. They became the impresarios of the cult, and achieved influence and also independence from the ordinary obligations of society to some extent. The encouragement of the cult of the martyrs and the exchange of their relics was appropriate to consolidate a bishop's position inside and outside his community.

Following this section, we turn to the detailed analysis of the burial chambers of Sopianae. The main questions are how they were influenced by these tendencies of the general church in the second half of the fourth century and whether they accommodated any relics of martyrs.

5.3. The Sancti Quattro Coronati

The cults of the martyrs gained importance in the Balkan region after 313, since only a small number of Christian martyrdoms occurred in the area before the late third-century persecution.⁴¹⁷ The emergence of martyr cults was accompanied by the appearance of the first *martyria* (memorial buildings) in the Balkans in the fourth century. This phenomenon can be interpreted in the broader context of the

⁴¹⁷ A. Balogh, *Pannónia őskereszténysége* [Early Christianity in Pannonia] (1932); M. Jarak, 'Martyres Pannoniae' (1996); S. Ćurčić, *Architecture in the Balkans* (2010), 59.

period. In the fourth century, the identity of Pannonia's population was being constructed, partly through the expression of the united regional sense of *patria Pannonia*, and also through the participation in the new religious identity of the quickly spreading Christianity.⁴¹⁸

One of the most important martyr cults was associated with Sirmium, the centre of the province Pannonia Inferior during the Tetrarchy⁴¹⁹ (present-day Sremska Mitrovica, Serbia). (For the map of Pannonia, see Figure 2) This is the cult of four stonemasons, better known as the *Quattuor Coronati*, executed in Sirmium during the reign of Diocletian. The name *Quattuor Coronati* probably refers to the crown of martyrdom and has been attributed to two groups of martyrs, one from Pannonia and one from Rome.⁴²⁰

In fact, the Pannonian group of martyrs consists of five saints, SS. Claudius, Castorius, Simpronianus, and Nicostratus and a fifth, Simplicitus.⁴²¹ Their story is known from a *passio* surviving in an eight-century manuscript.⁴²² There are twenty-three codices written between the eight and fourteenth centuries, which contain the text of this *passio*.⁴²³

They were all stonemasons, who worked for the emperor Diocletian in the quarries of Pannonia. The skills of the first four men were particularly valued by the emperor. They practised their Christian faith in secret and converted Simplicitus. When the emperor asked them to carve a statue of the god Asclepius, the five declined. Their jealous colleagues accused them of sacrilege and magic. The tribune Lampadius conducted the investigation into their case and at the end, gave a command to the stonemasons to venerate the statue of the Sun-God that they themselves had carved, but in vain. On Diocletian's orders, the five stonemasons were thrown into a river in five lead boxes. After forty-two days, the Christian Nicodemus found the boxes with the bodies inside and took them to his home. The story of the

⁴¹⁸ D. Dzino, A. D. Kunić, 'Pannonians' (2012), 106.

⁴¹⁹ J. Fitz, *Die Verwaltung Pannoniens in der Römerzeit* (1994), 1183.

⁴²⁰ L. Barelli, *The Monumental Complex of Santi Quattro Coronati in Rome* (2009), 7-9.

⁴²¹ L. Nagy, *Pannóniai városok, mártírok, ereklyék* [Cities, Martyrs and Relics in Pannonia] (2012), 109-90.

⁴²² *Passio Quattuor Coronatorum*, H. Delehaye (ed.), in *Acta Sanctorum*, ed. novissima (1931).

⁴²³ V. Lalošević, 'Problemi vezani uz mučeničku grupu Svetih Četvorice Ovjenčanih' [The Problems Regarding the Group of Martyr Saints Quattuor Coronati] (2006), 59-60, note 1.

passio ends at this point. It is not specified what happened to the remains of the five martyrs and how their cult arrived in Rome.

The second group of martyrs consists of four anonymous Roman soldiers, who were *conrnicularii* (officers) in Diocletian's army. Their *passio* story shows some similarities to that of the stonemasons. The four Roman soldiers refused to offer sacrifice to the god Asclepius in the temple of the Baths of Trajan. The emperor sentenced them to death by *plumbatae* – to be beaten with whips armed with lead balls at the end of each cord. The martyrdom in Rome happened two years earlier and according to the legends, on the same day as that of the five stonemasons. Their names were unknown; therefore it seemed appropriate to Pope Melchiades (311-314) to order their feast be celebrated under the names of Claudius, Nicostratus, Simpronianus and Castorius.⁴²⁴

The confusion of the two different groups was also apparent in the Early Middle Ages. Pope Leo IV (847-855), who reconstructed the complex of *Sancti Quattro Coronati* in Rome, ordered a search for the relics of the four soldiers, the five stonemasons and a third group, the martyrs of Albano. All relics were placed together in the crypt of the basilica on the north side of the Coelian Hill. 'In this way, Pope Leo ensured that the relics of the eponymous martyrs would be venerated, whoever they were.'⁴²⁵

A comprehensive and academically satisfactory explanation for the aggregation of the different martyr groups has not yet been provided. In her book about the Church of the *Quattro Coronati* in Rome, L. Barelli offers a possible solution. According to this theory, so little was conserved about the possibly soldier martyrs in the Roman tradition, that they could have been intermixed easily with the Pannonian stonemasons. It is probable that refugees, who escaped Pannonia as a result of the barbarian pressure from the fifth and early sixth centuries, brought the cults of their martyrs to Rome. And although the martyrdom of the Pannonian stonemasons took place at an earlier date, since they bore in part the same names as the Roman *cornicularii* and because their relics were transferred to the same cemetery

⁴²⁴ L. Barelli, *The Monumental Complex of Santi Quattro Coronati in Rome* (2009), 9.

⁴²⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

at Via Labicana, where the Roman group was buried also, in the end, they overlapped with the Roman group in church memory.⁴²⁶

According to another hypothesis, there is no direct reference to the Pannonian origin of the stonemasons in their *passio*, therefore it cannot be excluded that they were originally craftsmen from Rome who just travelled to Pannonia to have job there.⁴²⁷ This opinion is also complemented by the presumption that the trial of the stonemasons was not conducted in Pannonia either, but in the imperial court in Rome.⁴²⁸ These putative circumstances would explain the presence of the cult of these martyrs in Rome.

There has been a tendency in the research of Sopianae to attempt to discover any connection between Sopianae and the Four Crowned Martyrs. One of the earliest suggestions places the porphyry quarry, mentioned in the *passio*, not far from Sopianae, in the Geresd Hills and proposes that the site of the trial and martyrdom was in the closest town, in Sopianae. To support this hypothesis it was proposed that 'Quinque Ecclesiae' (The Churches of the Five), Pécs's name in the Middle Ages conserved the tradition of the cult and basilica of the five stonemasons in the town.⁴²⁹

This theory has some difficulties. No evidence has been found since the 1950s which would verify any continuity between the ancient Sopianae and the Medieval Quinque Ecclesiae. Although some buildings of the late Roman cemetery of Sopianae were used for habitation during the Migration Period, there is no proof for any continuity between the population and the cults of Late Antique Roman and Medieval Hungarian inhabitants.⁴³⁰

Another difficulty is connected to the results of some mineral tests published about the Geresd Hills in the 1990s. These excluded the mining of such stone there either in the Roman or in the modern era that would be suitable for stone

⁴²⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴²⁷ H. Hildebrandt, 'Early Christianity in Roman Pannonia – facts among fictions?' (2006), 63.

⁴²⁸ P. Kovács (ed.), *Fontes Pannoniae Antiquae in aetate Tetrarchum* (2011), 120-1.

⁴²⁹ D. Simonyi, 'Pécs „Quinque Ecclesiae” nevének eredetéről' [About the Origin of Sopianae's Name 'Quinque Ecclesiae'] (1959), 101-3.

⁴³⁰ F. Fülep, *Sopianae* (1984), 294; E. Tóth, 'A Quinque Basilicae – Quinque Ecclesiae helynevek lokalizálásához és értelmezéséhez,' [Localization and Interpretation of the Place Names Quinque Basilicae and Quinque Ecclesiae] (1991), 101-4.

cutting or stone sculpturing.⁴³¹ This fact makes the suggestion of locating the stonemasons' work and execution to Sopianae's vicinity improbable.

5.4. Martyr Relics in the SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber

As it has been seen, there is a tendency in the study of Sopianae to make connections between the town's Roman cemetery and the four (or five) stonemason martyrs of the province. There is a primary interest in the research of the SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber to interpret it as a memorial to martyrs.⁴³² The argumentation usually consists of two hypotheses.

The first is that the SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber contained relics of martyrs. This hypothesis can be argued effectively, though only when relying on indirect evidence. Three approaches of the argumentation will be described. The first approach builds on archaeological, the second and the third on iconographic arguments.

The second hypothesis suggests that the relics of the four Pannonian stonemasons were found in the SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber. However, it can only be argued with less certainty, as it builds on the first hypothesis.

5.4.1. Hypothesis 1: the SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber contained martyr relics

a. Archaeological approach

At the nether part of the northern, back wall of the burial chamber there is a 0.73-0.78 meter high and 0.15-0.18 meter wide brick shoulder. The probably lime pavement of the room did not survive, although it was still undamaged at the time of the discovery of the burial chamber at the end of the eighteenth century (cf. Chapter

⁴³¹ D. Peacock, 'The *Passio Sanctorum Quattuor Coronatorum*' (1995), 364-5; M. Tomović, 'The *Passio Sanctorum IV Coronatorum* and the Fruška Gora hypothesis' (1997), 230-2.

⁴³² E. Dyggve, 'Das Mausoleum in Pécs' (1935), 67-75; Z. Kádár, *Pannonia ókeresztény emlékeinek ikonográfiája* [The Iconography of Early Christian Monuments in Pannonia] (1939), 8; F. Gerke, 'Die Wandmalereien der Petrus-Paulus-Katakomba in Pécs' (1954), 161. 164. 178. 186. 190-1; K. Hudák, L. Nagy, *A Fine and Private Place* (2009), 82.

1.1).⁴³³ In the wall, there is a window (0.43 x 0.36 m). (Figure 19) Behind this *fenestella*, there is a two-meter long and a-half-meter wide semicircular niche, a *loculus*.⁴³⁴

The architectural structure of the building and particularly the position of this *loculus* is reminiscent of the aforementioned Anastasius Mausoleum in Marusinac, Dalmatia.⁴³⁵ (Figure 63) The similarity between the two structures indicates that the *loculus* in the main wall of the SS Peter and Paul Chamber might have served similar purposes as in Marusinac.⁴³⁶

The Anastasius Mausoleum is a small, two-storey structure. (Figure 61 and Figure 62) It is marked by prominent spur buttresses on the outside. The upper floor provided space for memorial services, whilst the lower level accommodated the tomb of the martyr in the apse and three tombs in the chamber in front of it. A *loculus* was built in the apse of the burial chamber here, too. It provided a place for the relics of martyr Anastasius.⁴³⁷ The two spaces were separated by a small window for purposes of spiritual communication with the saint.

This cemetery building was obviously dependent on late Roman mausolea in its design and construction. (Its closest parallel is the mausoleum at Turbe, near Travnik, today Bosnia.)⁴³⁸ The Anastasius Mausoleum type circulated widely in the Roman Empire. There are resembling structures at various points of Europe. One can be found in La Alberca in the Iberian Peninsula (today Spain),⁴³⁹ (cf. Chapter 5.1.3 and Figure 60) a partially underground mausoleum in Naissus (today Jagodin Mala, Niš, Serbia)⁴⁴⁰ and the Early Christian Mausoleum (Figure 40), another building in the Sopiana cemetery (also Chapter 5.1.3).⁴⁴¹

⁴³³ O. Szőnyi, *A pécsi őskeresztény sírkamra* [The Paleochristian Burial Chamber in Pécs] (1907), 23. 82.

⁴³⁴ K. Hudák, L. Nagy, *A Fine and Private Place* (2009), 39.

⁴³⁵ E. Dyggve, R. Egger, *Der altchristliche Friedhof Marusinac* (1939), 112; E. Dyggve, *History of Salonitan Christianity* (1951), 74; F. Deichmann, *Einführung in die christliche Archäologie* (1983), 56-8.

⁴³⁶ F. Fülep, *Sopiana* (1984), 41.

⁴³⁷ A. Grabar, *Martyrium* (1946), vol. 1, 217-8, vol. 2, 39-41; E. Dyggve, R. Egger, *Der altchristliche Friedhof Marusinac* (1939), 112; F. Deichmann, *Einführung in die christliche Archäologie* (1983), 58.

⁴³⁸ S. Čurčić, *Architecture in the Balkans* (2010), 60.

⁴³⁹ K. Bowes, *Private Worship, Public Values* (2008), 142.

⁴⁴⁰ S. Čurčić, *Architecture in the Balkans* (2010), 147.

⁴⁴¹ F. Fülep, 'A pécsi ókeresztény mauzóleum ásátása' [The excavations of the Early Christian Mausoleum in Pécs] (1977), 254; K. Hudák, L. Nagy, *A Fine and Private Place* (2009), 19.

In the case of the SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber, the *loculus* itself is also emphasized by the iconography of the burial chamber. The *fenestella* which leads to the *loculus* is in the middle of the main wall of the room. It is surrounded by the principle composition of the chamber: the great Christogram with a laurel wreath⁴⁴² and the apostles Peter and Paul on its two sides. The *fenestella* is directly under the Christogram. This composition directs the viewer's attention to the *loculus* and can arouse his interest. It indicates that something important was behind the *fenestella*, which could have been some relics. These relics might have been derived from the four Pannonian stonemasons.

b. The four medallions

On the relatively well preserved barrel vault of the burial chamber, there are four medallions painted surrounded by floral (acanthus and vine tendrils, flower bundles) and avian (peacock, dove) motifs. In each medallion, a young, beardless person is depicted. It can be guessed that they are male. Their faces and head shapes are different, but not genuine portraits. The four figures wear white tunics with double stripes. Their garments are almost identical, only their colours differ. (Figure 16)

K. Hudák asserts:

The pictorial style of the Sopiana heads conform to the canon of late fourth century Roman art with oval, or heart-shaped heads, flat faces, narrow, straight noses and "bonnet-like" hairstyles covering the forehead: *Fin de siècle* portraiture was also characterized by the same upward-gazing glances express a longing for spiritual truth.⁴⁴³

There are iconographic elements in these images that seem to support the identification of these four figures as martyrs. The garment typically communicates 'a visual indication of a person's status or identity, in art as well as in life.'⁴⁴⁴ Their garments have been interpreted as 'apostolic costume'⁴⁴⁵ and an indication of mar-

⁴⁴² D. Braun, 'Lorbeer' (2010).

⁴⁴³ K. Hudák, *The iconographical program of the wallpaintings* (2009), 61.

⁴⁴⁴ R. Jensen, *Living water* (2011), 27.

⁴⁴⁵ F. Gerke, 'Die Wandmalereien der Petrus-Paulus-Katakomben in Pécs' (1954), 164.

tyrdom.⁴⁴⁶ The red circles engirdling the busts may also refer to martyrdom. They have been interpreted as *corona purpurea*, the crown of the martyrs reddened by their blood.⁴⁴⁷ The plants and birds around the medallions can be regarded as a paradisiacal context.⁴⁴⁸ These motifs were part of a collective narrative in Late Antiquity and expressed a common and shared hope for life after death in terms of a supernatural foliage.⁴⁴⁹

On an iconographic basis, it seems highly probable that these four figures belong together. However, because of their apparent same age and sex, they could not form a single family. The iconographic consistency of the images also seems to challenge the fact that they would have been portraits⁴⁵⁰ of real individuals.

There are portraits about which it is difficult to determine whether they were a saint's depiction or a simple memorial portrait. Particularly in the earlier period of Christian artefacts, there was less difference between an ordinary funeral portrait and a saint's image. However, after Constantine's reign, saints' images more often started to occur in the Roman catacombs as part of the decoration of ordinary tombs. In the fourth century, the increasing interest in the cult of relics redounded to the spread of saints' images. Their appearance became widespread, being proximate or not to the relics.⁴⁵¹

There are various reasons why this chamber cannot be the burial chamber of the four as a group. The size of the burial chamber (3x2.80 m)⁴⁵² does not allow enough space for four equal stone sarcophagi. In any case, more than one sarcophagus would cover a good part of the wall paintings. It is also strongly questionable whether in such an opulent grave any corpse would have been buried into the bare ground not in a sarcophagus. It is no way unusual to have a burial chamber just with one sarcophagus. There are examples of burial chambers with just a single burial in this same cemetery: these are burial chambers III and IV, each of which is 2.5-

⁴⁴⁶ They were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number would be complete both of their fellow-servants and of their brothers and sisters, who were soon to be killed as they themselves had been killed. (Apocalypse 6:11)

⁴⁴⁷ F. Gerke, 'Die Wandmalereien der Petrus-Paulus-Katakomba in Pécs' (1954), 164.

⁴⁴⁸ F. Bisconti, 'Paradiso', in F. Bisconti (ed.), *Temi di iconografia paleocristiana* (2000), 241.

⁴⁴⁹ A. Brent, 'Methodological Perspectives' (2014), 23.

⁴⁵⁰ Cf. K. Schade, 'Portät' (2016).

⁴⁵¹ R. Jensen, *Face to Face* (2004), 174.

⁴⁵² K. Hudák, L. Nagy, *A Fine and Private Place* (2009), 39.

metre long.⁴⁵³ The Burial Chamber with the Jar, whose area is about 2.3 x 2.45 metres (it is only half-a-metre shorter than the SS Peter and Paul Chamber), contains two sarcophagi and the entire room is occupied.⁴⁵⁴ (Figure 31)

A close parallel of this composition on the barrel vault can be found in the Catacomb of Thecla in Rome. This catacomb was discovered in the 1950s and is still closed to the public. The image of a woman is painted in one of the arches who is supposed to be the owner of the catacomb and patron of its arts. This bejewelled female figure is dressed in elegant clothing and stands with her daughter between two saints. This image and other elaborate and richly coloured wall paintings suggest that the catacomb might have housed a noblewoman.

An opulently painted room of this catacomb is the Cubicle of the Apostles.⁴⁵⁵ (Figure 69) The side walls are decorated with the pictures of Daniel in the nude, with lions at his feet, Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead, Peter drawing water in the prison, the Adoration of the Magi and Abraham sacrificing Isaac. In the middle of the vaulting, there is a large image of the Good Shepherd in a circle. In the four edges of the rectangular area, there are four medallions with an apostle in each. To the picture of the apostles, Peter and Paul, who are depicted with their usual physiognomic features (see Chapter 6.2), the images of Andrew and John are added. (Figure 70) These portraits of Andrew and John predate the oldest representations previously known by a century.⁴⁵⁶ The medallions are set against saturated red and black backgrounds, which colours often occur in late imperial Roman art.⁴⁵⁷

Although the style and the colours of this painting are different, the similitude in composition to the SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber is visible. In the central medallion, there is a representation of Christ in both cases: the Good Shepherd in the Catacomb of Thecla and the Christogram in Sopianae. (For the significance of this Christogram in the whole iconographic program of the SS Peter and Paul Chamber, see G. Heidl's hypothesis in Chapter 7.6 and for the possible presence of the Good Shepherd in this same chamber, see Chapter 9). In the Cubicle of the Apostles,

⁴⁵³ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁴⁵⁴ F. Fülep, A. Fetter, 'Neuere Forschungen in der ausgemalten frühchristlichen Grabkammer No II. von Pécs' (1969-1970), 91; K. Hudák, L. Nagy, *A Fine and Private Place* (2009), 31.

⁴⁵⁵ B. Mazzei, *Il cubicolo degli apostoli nelle catacombe romane di Santa Tecla* (2010).

⁴⁵⁶ M. Minasi, 'Apostoli', in F. Bisconti (ed.), *Temi di iconografia paleocristiana* (2000), 124-6.

⁴⁵⁷ R. Ling, *Roman painting* (1991); H. Mielsch, *Römische Wandmalerei* (2001).

in the four smaller medallions, four apostles appear, probably the four most significant, who were closely related to Christ in the gospels. (On the iconographic representation of the hierarchy of Christ and the apostles Peter and Paul, see Chapter 6.3.1.)

The four men in the medallions in Sopianae received iconographic positions similar to those of the four apostles in the Catacomb of Thecla. Therefore, it can be assumed that they were given similar veneration. In consequence, this parallel in iconography supports the opinion that these four men should be interpreted as saints or martyrs.

Relying on the iconographic features of the persons in the medallions and the presence of the two main apostles on the back wall it is argued that the commissioner of the grave wished to be buried *ad sanctos* and the relics of the saints were placed into the niche behind the *fenestella*.

c. The general iconographic program of the chamber

The latest and most comprehensive research of the SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber was done by K. Hudák.⁴⁵⁸ In her study, the iconographic program of the burial chamber is placed into a broader context of the history of the church. According to her research, the decoration of the SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber was created under the influence of the church's fight against and victory over the heretic anti-Nicene teachings in the Danube region.⁴⁵⁹ (Cf. Chapter 4.3.) The images of this burial chamber might have been closely connected to the orthodox propaganda represented and promoted by Pope Damasus and Ambrose, bishop of Milan.⁴⁶⁰ For instance, Ambrose transferred relics of the apostles Peter and Paul to Milan and did not stop exchanging relics even after 386 AD, when an imperial edict prohibited the opening of tombs, especially those of the martyrs, and the transfer of any parts of

⁴⁵⁸ *A Fine and Private Place* by K. Hudák and L. Nagy and *The iconographical program of the wall-paintings in the St Peter and Paul burial chamber of Sopianae (Pécs)* by K. Hudák were both published in 2009.

⁴⁵⁹ K. Hudák, *The iconographical program of the wallpaintings* (2009), 72-5; K. Hudák, L. Nagy, *A Fine and Private Place* (2009), 58-61.

⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 59-60.

corpses.⁴⁶¹ (More details have been provided on Ambrose and the transfer of martyr relics earlier in Chapter 5.2.2.)

If this theory is correct, these two well known supporters of the cults of martyrs could influence not only the decoration of the burial chamber both intellectually and spiritually, but also the commissioner(s) to place some martyr relics in the burial chamber.

5.4.2. *Hypothesis 2: The SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber contained the relics of the Sancti Quattro Coronati*

As it has been suggested about the four medallions on the barrel vault of the burial chamber in the second argument of the first hypothesis, it is not plausible that the four depicted men would have formed a family, would have been four brothers or four churchmen buried together in this chamber. However, it seems possible that the images of the four men are of deceased people who were not buried in this grave.

This statement is supported by the fact that the decoration of the SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber has a strong relation to the traditions of the funerary art in late Imperial Era. The decorative elements of the burial chamber can be derived from the motives of Christian funerary art in Italy or the Balkans.⁴⁶² Such portrait-like images in this iconographic tradition typically depict deceased people; they are neither symbolic, nor ideal typical.⁴⁶³

The influence of Roman catacomb art is particularly obvious in the parallels between the Catacombs of SS Peter and Marcellinus on Via Labicana and SS Peter and Paul in Sopianae. The most important of them is the image on the barrel vault of the aristocratic Cubiculum No. 3. That image (Figure 71) depicts Christ at the summit of a pyramid with the apostles Peter and Paul on his sides and the four most venerated martyrs (Tiburtinus, Gorgonius, Petrus and Marcellinus⁴⁶⁴) at the

⁴⁶¹ Paulinus diaconus Mediolanensis, *Vita Sancti Ambrosii*, 33 (PL 14.27-46c); cited by E. Dassmann, 'Ambrosius und die Märtyrer' (1975), 54-8.

⁴⁶² L. Nagy, *Pannóniai városok, mártírok, ereklyék* [Cities, Martyrs and Relics in Pannonia] (2012), 177.

⁴⁶³ K. Hudák, *The iconographical program of the wallpaintings* (2009), 64, note 67. It provides a good selection of symbolic and ideal typical interpretations of the four medallions and their disproof.

⁴⁶⁴ Damasus, *Epigrammata*, 28, 31-32. (A. Ferrua (ed.), *Epigrammata Damasiana*, (1942).

base of the pyramid.⁴⁶⁵ The four men are placed on the two sides of a lamb. This la13:8; 14:1mb, usually seen as the Lamb of God (cf. *John* 1:29; 19:31) and the Lamb from the *Book of Revelation* (),⁴⁶⁶ refers to Christ who is seated just above the lamb on the same vertical axle. The four martyrs at the bottom 'indicate with eloquent gestures of acclamation the celestial vortex composed by the triad of Christ, Peter and Paul.'⁴⁶⁷ The composition also emphasizes the concord between the saints and the deceased in an explicit way. This image of the Peter and Marcellinus catacomb is echoed in the main wall of SS Peter and Paul in Sopianae not so much in style, but rather in regard of the iconography, the composition and dating.⁴⁶⁸

It is attested in the *Depositio Martyrum* (the first calendar of martyrs of the Church of Rome), dating to the early fourth century, that the *Sancti Quattro Coronati* (even though they might have been more likely to be the Roman *cornicularii* interchanged with the Pannonian stonemasons) were venerated right at the Catacombs of Peter and Marcellinus on Via Labicana.⁴⁶⁹ Some itineraries, which were compiled between the seventh and eighth centuries for the pilgrims arriving in Rome, also confirm the burial of the four martyrs in the cemetery of SS Peter and Marcellinus.⁴⁷⁰

Hereupon, it seemed expedient to some scholars to connect the two facts, the iconographic similarities between the Catacombs of Peter and Marcellinus, on the one hand, and the same catacomb as the cult centre of the *Quattro Coronati*, on the other, as a hypothesis for the presence of the relics of the *Quattro Coronati* in the SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber in Sopianae.⁴⁷¹ This theory presupposes that a person in Sopianae received some pieces of the relics of the four Roman soldier martyrs, who were confused with the Pannonian stonemasons. This same person might have ordered to place these relics next to his sarcophagus into the niche be-

⁴⁶⁵ J. Deckers, H. Seeliger, G. Mietke, *Die Katakombe "Santi Pietro e Marcellino"* (1987), 199-201.

⁴⁶⁶ U. Utro, 'Allegoria', in F. Bisconti (ed.), *Temi di iconografia paleocristiana* (2000), 104; M. Frenschkowski, 'Lamm Gottes' (2008); G.-H. Baudry, *Handbuch der frühchristlichen Ikonographie* (2010), 40-1.

⁴⁶⁷ V. Fiocchi-Nicolai, F. Bisconti, D. Mazzoleni, *The Christian Catacombs of Rome* (2002²), 129.

⁴⁶⁸ L. Nagy, *Pannóniai városok, mártírok, ereklyék* [Cities, Martyrs and Relics in Pannonia] (2012), 177.

⁴⁶⁹ L. Barelli, *The Monumental Complex of Santi Quattro Coronati in Rome* (2009), 10.

⁴⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷¹ K. Hudák, *The iconographical program of the wallpaintings* (2009), 66-70; K. Hudák, L. Nagy, *A Fine and Private Place* (2009), 84-5; J. Makkay, *Pécs – Quinque Ecclesiae* (2007), 20-4.

hind the *fenestella*. In the literature, this possible event is called ‘partial translation of relics to Sopianae’ in the 390s.⁴⁷²

5.4.3. Conclusion

Although the interpretation of the SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber generally uses many hypotheses with different degrees of probability, this one seems to be one of the more uncertain ones. K. Hudák herself admits that there is no inscription, no funerary basilica, and no local tradition⁴⁷³ that would make the hypothesis about the presence of any martyr relics in the Sopianae cemetery probable.⁴⁷⁴ However, it cannot be categorically excluded that evidence for all of these criteria perished in the insecure and chaotic periods after the disintegration of Roman rule and society in Pannonia. Notwithstanding the precariousness of this hypothesis, it cannot be denied that it provides the most coherent explanation for the architectural purpose of the niche in the back of the chamber and for the iconography of the four medallions on the barrel vault. It is conceivable that the SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber is the last evidence that implies a cult of martyrs once present in Sopianae.

⁴⁷² L. Nagy, *Pannóniai városok, mártírok, ereklyék* [Cities, Martyrs and Relics in Pannonia] (2012), 181.

⁴⁷³ P. Testini specified these three criteria for the existence of a martyr's tomb. (P. Testini, *Archeologia cristiana* (1980), 126-7).

⁴⁷⁴ K. Hudák, L. Nagy, *A Fine and Private Place* (2009), 84.

6. The Iconography of Peter and Paul

The main wall of the SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber in Sopianae is occupied by a wall painting whose two main figures are identified as the apostles Peter and Paul. The burial chamber was named after them after its discovery in 1782.⁴⁷⁵ In this section, the couple of Peter and Paul's iconography will be studied. During the fourth century, there was an intensified interest in their cult and parallel with this, a transformation in their representations in art. These two tendencies led to the enhancement of their role and the consolidation of their individual iconography. This is also attested by their image in the cemetery of Sopianae.

6.1. Historical Background

The apostles Peter and Paul held special significance in the history of Rome. Although the New Testament does not mention Peter's presence in Rome, the succession of Roman bishops traditionally starts with him.⁴⁷⁶ According to the traditions, Paul also went to Rome, and it was said that he had been martyred on the same day as Peter (the 29th of June).⁴⁷⁷ The idea of Peter and Paul being regarded as the two spiritual founders of Rome gained importance during the fourth century.

The fourth century brought a lot of changes in Rome's history in general. The legal recognition of the Christian Church by Constantine and the removal of the traditional centre of government from Rome to Constantinople, to his new Christian capital in the first half of the century had a great impact on Rome. Afterwards, Rome's role was further complicated by the enhancement of strategic cities as centres of government in the West, such as Trier, Milan and Ravenna. Another difficulty was that some of the emperors sympathised with heretical doctrines, in particular,

⁴⁷⁵ J. Koller, *Prolegomena in historiam Episcopatus Quinqueecclesiarum* (1804), 25-6.

⁴⁷⁶ O. Zwielerlein, *Petrus in Rom* (2010²), 156-77.

⁴⁷⁷ O. Zwielerlein, *Petrus und Paulus in Jerusalem und Rom* (2013), 105-21.

with Arianism, and attempted to support the heretics and make them be accepted by the whole church of the Empire.⁴⁷⁸

The reaction of the Roman Church was that it started to increasingly emphasize its claim to apostolic authority and primacy. There was an attempt to meet the challenges on the authority of the Roman Church and to reaffirm its credibility. This propagation was manifest in the revival and involvement of different local traditions (sometimes of uncertain origins), the restoration of the shrines of martyrs, the enhancement of their cult, and the composition of the commemorative inscriptions by Pope Damasus. The popularisation of the cult of the *concordia* of the apostolic founders of the Church at Rome was also intensifying in the second half of the fourth century.⁴⁷⁹

The process of reaction was expressed in the art of the period as well, since artefacts can be used easily as instruments of propaganda. The frequent occurrences of Peter and Paul in the Roman iconography of the fourth century can be interpreted in this context.⁴⁸⁰ The joint cult of Peter and Paul was not only appropriate to convey the message of the Roman bishops, but also to encourage the people of Rome during the period of barbarian menace. Therefore, the signs of the veneration of the two apostles were to be found in the homes of the ordinary Roman citizen, and in the decoration of basilicas, which were built during the fourth century.

The widespread occurrences of the two main apostles in Rome were attested by a contemporaneous visitor. Augustine of Hippo paid a visit to Rome in the year 388.⁴⁸¹ He noted the ubiquity of monumental representations of Peter and Paul in the company of Christ throughout the city. He mentions this in *De consensu Evangelistarum*. In this writing, Augustine questions the authenticity of a pseudo-epigraphic epistle that was attributed anachronistically as coming from Christ to Peter and Paul.⁴⁸² He supposes that the authors of the text were misled by unhistorical images depicting Peter and Paul together with Christ. He says:

⁴⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 144-5.

⁴⁷⁹ J. M. Huskinson, *Concordia Apostolorum* (1982), 1.

⁴⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸¹ J. Spier, 'The earliest Christian art' (2007), 13.

⁴⁸² L. Grig, 'Portraits, pontiffs and the Christianisation of fourth century Rome' (2004), 226-7.

And so Peter and Paul occurred to them, I believe, just because in many places they chanced to see these two apostles represented in pictures as both in company with Him. For Rome, in a specially honourable and solemn manner, commends the merits of Peter and of Paul, for this reason among others, namely, that they suffered [martyrdom] on the same day.⁴⁸³ (De consensus Evangelistarum libri quattuor, 1.10.16)

This remark of Augustine testifies that the images of Peter and Paul had a particular significance in Rome in the late fourth century, but also that such images had a noticeable impact on viewers who transferred their message even into writings. The fact that Augustine could easily recognize the figures of the two main apostles was due to their individual iconography which had been created in the fourth century and was consolidated in a relatively short time. In the next section, this particular iconographic depiction will be described.

6.2. The Iconography of Peter and the Iconography of Paul

Although the development of the iconography of the two apostles, Peter and Paul in Rome started in the first half of the fourth century, their individual and physiognomic images occurred only after 350. Peter⁴⁸⁴ appeared earlier, first on the Jonah Sarcophagus at the beginning of the fourth century.⁴⁸⁵ The three earliest Peter images on sarcophagi are combined with certain depictions of Jesus' miracles.⁴⁸⁶ In the early period, before the middle of the century, Peter was not accompanied by Paul on sarcophagi, or in catacomb painting.

The features characterizing Peter's face are the thick, sometimes curly hair, a low forehead, a square jaw and a short or rounded, dense full beard.⁴⁸⁷ These features were already available in the repertoire of Roman workshops as one type of philosopher from the previous century, and when the demand for Christian sar-

⁴⁸³ M. B. Riddle (ed.), *The Harmony of the Gospels*, S. D. F. Salmond (trans.) (1888), 142.

⁴⁸⁴ E. Dassmann, 'Petrus III (Ikonographie und Kult)' (2016).

⁴⁸⁵ Today, it is in the Museo Pio Cristiano in the Vatican (formerly Lateran 119). (Cf., G. F. Snyder, *Ante Pacem* (1985), 41, plate 14; F. Bisconti, 'Pietro', in F. Bisconti (ed.), *Temi di iconografia paleocristiana* (2000), 258-9).

⁴⁸⁶ D. Cartlidge, J. K. Elliott, *Art and Christian Apocrypha* (2001), 163.

⁴⁸⁷ R. Jensen, 'The legacy of Paul – Art' (2011), 510.

cophagi was increasing, they were applied in the case of Peter's figure as well.⁴⁸⁸ It was common in the portrayal artefacts of the era that they accentuated certain personal attributes. Peter's idealised portrait shows him 'as a decisive figure, activist church builder, and strong leader.'⁴⁸⁹

Paul's image⁴⁹⁰ was distinguished from Peter's by an equally well-known type of portrait, which is traditionally connected to Plato, Socrates and Plotinus. This was a tall and slender figure with a long and narrow head with receding hairline and a long, full but pointed beard. In Paul's case, this type of portraits emphasizes his role as teacher, theologian and writer. In many cases, this one of his attributes is highlighted further by him either holding a scroll in his hand, or standing next to a basket (*capsa*⁴⁹¹) filled with scrolls.⁴⁹²

Paul's facial characteristics were in some respect in harmony with his description recorded in apocryphal acts.⁴⁹³ There is a detailed report about the physical appearance of Paul in the *Acta Pauli et Theclae*. Onesiphorus sees Paul as

[...] a man small of stature, with a bald head and crooked legs, in a good state of body, with eyebrows meeting and nose somewhat hooked, full of friendliness; for now he appeared like a man, and now he had the face of an angel. (*Acta Pauli et Theclae*, 3)⁴⁹⁴

According to this description, Paul had a short stature, curved legs and aquiline nose.⁴⁹⁵ Although it is quite formulaic, similarly to many other descriptions of Antiquity, the existence of the text is attested by Tertullian in the second century.⁴⁹⁶

⁴⁸⁸ J. M. Huskinson, *Concordia Apostolorum* (1982), 2.

⁴⁸⁹ R. Jensen, 'The legacy of Paul – Art' (2011), 510.

⁴⁹⁰ E. Dassmann, 'Paulus IV (Ikonographie und Kult' (2014).

⁴⁹¹ L. Koep, 'Buch III (metaphorisch und symbolisch)' (1954); J. Kollwitz, 'Capsa' (1954); M. Busia, 'Rotolo', in F. Bisconti (ed.), *Temi di iconografia paleocristiana* (2000), 274-5; C. Bordinon, 'Capsa', in F. Bisconti (ed.), *Temi di iconografia paleocristiana* (2000), 146-7.

⁴⁹² R. Jensen, 'The legacy of Paul – Art' (2011), 509.

⁴⁹³ W. H. Bradley, 'Have we authentic portraits of St. Paul?' (1897).

⁴⁹⁴ Reprinted (Darmstadt, 1959), 1. 237 lines 6-9. English translation: J. K. Elliott (trans.), *The Apocryphal New Testament* (1993); J. Barrier, *The acts of Paul and Thecla* (2009); R. Grant, 'The Description of Paul in the Acta Pauli' (1982); J. Bollók, 'The Description of Paul in the Acta Pauli' (1996); H. Omerzu, 'The Portrait of Paul's Outer Appearance in the Acts of Paul and Thecla' (2008); C. Callon, 'The Unibrow That Never Was' (2014).

⁴⁹⁵ J. Polhill, *Paul and his letters* (1999), 39.

⁴⁹⁶ [...] *si quae Acta Pauli, quae perperam scripta sunt, exemplum Theclae ad licentiam mulierum docendi tinguendique defendant [...]* (Tertullianus, *De baptismo* 17. in *De baptismo liber. Homily on baptism*, Text ed. with an introd., transl. and commentary by Ernest Evans, London, 1964, 36.)

It has been demonstrated that three of Paul's features, his small stature, hooked nose and meeting eyebrows, also appear in Suetonius' description of Emperor Augustus (*Vita Caesarum* 2.79.2).⁴⁹⁷ It is also suggested that the description of Paul in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* was derived from the traditions associated with Heracles.⁴⁹⁸ The basic assumption of physiognomic features was that *dispositions follow bodily characteristics and are not themselves unaffected by bodily impulses*.⁴⁹⁹ It was intended to reveal the social and psychological stature of the individual through universally understood physiognomic traits.⁵⁰⁰ According to another theory, Paul's visual representation as a philosopher arises from his literal portrayal in the *Acts of the Apostles*, where Paul's missionary work, trial and death might have modelled Socrates' biography.⁵⁰¹

Paul's distinct iconography did not appear in popular art in Rome before 350. His depiction was innovated when he was depicted in the company of Christ and Peter from the second half of the fourth century onwards. This fact means that recognising Paul as apostle of Rome was not considered to be important enough to be reflected in art before the middle of the century. Paul's differentiation from Peter was specific only to more exclusive workshops (*officinae*) in Rome, where the differentiation on occasion was so fine that it was almost indistinguishable.⁵⁰²

6.3. Christ Between Peter and Paul

Among the images depicting Peter and Paul in a single scene, the most common one is when the two apostles appear on the either side of Christ.⁵⁰³ J. M. Huskinson distinguishes two different forms of this composition in her monograph on the cult of

⁴⁹⁷ A. Malherbe, 'A Physical Description of Paul' (1986), 173.

⁴⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 174-5.

⁴⁹⁹ Ps.-Aristotle, *Physiognomica*, 805a; Cf. M. Tullius Cicero, *De fato*, 10.

⁵⁰⁰ E. Evans, *Physiognomics in the Ancient World* (1969).

⁵⁰¹ D. McDonald, 'Categorization of Antetextuality in the Gospels and Acts (2006).

⁵⁰² J. M. Huskinson, *Concordia Apostolorum* (1982), 4.

⁵⁰³ A. Nestori mentions these *cubicula* of the Roman catacombs where Christ, Peter and Paul occur in a common composition: Domitilla 19, Gordianus and Epimachus 1, Peter and Marcellinus 3, Praettestatus 6, Via Latina 9 (A. Nestori, *Repertorio topografico delle pitture delle catacombe romane* (1975), 211).

Peter and Paul in the fourth- and fifth-century Rome.⁵⁰⁴ The earliest of these images in the catacombs developed from the scene in which Christ is portrayed in the midst of the apostolic college. In this type, Peter is to the right of Christ, which is on the left hand side from the viewer's point of view. The second type referred to as '*concordia apostolorum*' organises the composition in the opposite way: Paul is on the left hand side, Peter on the right.

6.3.1. The 'apostolic college' type

a. Examples

A good site to observe the development in the iconography of Peter and Paul is the Catacomb of Domitilla. The Catacomb of Domitilla is one of the oldest public catacombs in Rome. The oldest areas of the catacomb are the Hypogeum of the Good Shepherd originating from the first decades of the third century⁵⁰⁵ and the Hypogeum of the Flavians, which was Christianized around the middle of the third century.⁵⁰⁶ In this catacomb, there are five depictions of Christ surrounded by apostles (either by Peter and Paul, or by the whole college).⁵⁰⁷

There is an *arcosolium* near to the Crypt of Ampliatus, which is called the Cubicle of the 'Great Apostles'. There is an image in the lunette above the *loculus*, in which Christ sits in the middle on a throne with a half-open scroll in his hand and is surrounded by his disciples. (Figure 72) Some parts of the figures in the lower area are not visible, since a burial niche was constructed in the wall under the lunette later on and it caused the demolition of the lower part of the picture. In this picture, the twelve apostles encircling Christ are not identifiable individually.⁵⁰⁸

The next occurrence is in the Crypt of the Bakers. It is a wide *cubiculum* located in a region of the catacomb which is rich in wall paintings. On one of the two burial niches, the Good Shepherd is depicted, on the other one, Christ between the apostles. (Figure 73) The main, beardless figure is sitting on a throne in the centre. There is a casket (*capsa*) at his feet containing scrolls. The twelve apostles are ar-

⁵⁰⁴ J. M. Huskinson, *Concordia Apostolorum* (1982).

⁵⁰⁵ V. Flocchi-Nicolai, F. Bisconti, D. Mazzolenzi, *The Christian Catacombs of Rome* (2002²), 23; U. M. Fasola B., *The catacombs of Domitilla* (2002³), 61.

⁵⁰⁶ U. M. Fasola B., *The catacombs of Domitilla* (2002³), 15.

⁵⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁵⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

ranged on both sides of the throne divided into two symmetrical groups. On both sides, one of the six apostles is sitting like Christ, while the other ten are standing.⁵⁰⁹

The third example is to be found in the *cubiculum* of Diogenes, which probably belonged to a *fossor*, maybe to one of the leaders of the grave diggers, who worked in this catacomb. Diogenes' name is engraved in an inscription between two doves on a plaque (*tabula inscriptionis*) marked with axes.⁵¹⁰ In the soffit of the burial niche of this *cubiculum*, Christ is depicted between the apostles Peter and Paul. Paul's image is still visible on the right hand side. (Figure 74) He is characterized in the customary way: he is bald and has a long black pointed beard. At his feet, there is a casket (*capsa*) full of scrolls. Paul himself holds one of the scrolls with both hands.⁵¹¹

Close to Diogenes' *cubiculum*, there is the fourth occurrence of Christ in the company of apostles. This *arcosolium* is called the 'Small Apostles' to distinguish it from the aforementioned Crypt of the 'Great Apostles'. (Figure 75) The decoration of this *arcosolium* differs from the former ones since Christ is represented here in a symbolic way. In the lunette of the *arcosolium*, there is an almost completely demolished fresco of a praying female figure. At the upper zone of the lunette, there is a Constantinian monogram of Christ. The female *orante* figure is located between the apostles, Peter on the left and Paul on the right. The features of both of the apostles are obviously differentiated by their respective distinctive iconography: Peter has a short beard; Paul has a longish, thick beard.⁵¹²

The fifth example is out of line, since it is not a wall painting, but a fine mosaic, which is quite rare in the Roman catacombs. The *arcosolium* is located close to a staircase not far from the *cubiculum* of the 'small apostles' and is dated to the second half of the fourth century.⁵¹³ (Figure 76) The whole cubicle is covered by well preserved mosaic decorations. The *arcosolium* with the mosaic decoration had been already discovered by G. Marangoni in 1742, but its exact location was later

⁵⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 69-71.

⁵¹⁰ *Diogenes fossor in pace depositus octabu kalendas octobris (Inscriptiones christianae urbis Romae septimo saeculo antiquiores, nova series, vol. 3, Coemeteria in via Ardeatina cum duabus appendicibus, (1956), 6649).*

⁵¹¹ U. M. Fasola B., *The catacombs of Domitilla* (2002³), 53.

⁵¹² *Ibid.*, 51.

⁵¹³ *Ibid.*, 54-5.

lost. It was rediscovered only in 1960 by A. Ferrua after a landslide.⁵¹⁴ The lunette on the back wall depicts the figure of Christ with two other figures on his sides. There is an inscription in the soffit of the *arcosolium* composed with green *tesserae*: *qui filius diceris et pater inveniris*. The scene connected with this inscription is interpreted as one of *maiestas Domini*, since Christ is enthroned between the two main apostles, Peter and Paul and there is a *capsa* of volumes in front of him.⁵¹⁵

b. Analysis These five examples of the same catacomb present the plurality in the iconography of the apostolic college. The images of this type in the Catacomb of Domitilla show a notable diversity of compositions from the complete, but not individualised representation of the twelve apostles to the emergence of the two apostles, Peter and Paul, and the disappearance of the other ten. Parallel with this, the individual characteristics of Peter and Paul appear and subsequently, they become distinguishable from each other.

The picture of the Cubiculum of the Bakers is a blatant example of this multiplicity. The special role of the two main apostles is depicted explicitly in iconographic terms. They obviously belong to the group of Christ's disciples as suggested by their position and garments. The symmetrical arrangement of the group on both sides of Christ does not only occupy the physical setting of the wall painting appropriately, but also suggests the orderliness of a corporation.

The importance of the two main apostles is emphasised by iconographic elements. The sitting position of the two highlighted figures make them similar to the sitting Christ and in this way, they are ordered above the other ten. However, they do not sit on a throne like Christ, rather on folding chairs (*sellae plicatiles*). Secondly, the faces of the two main apostles are distinguished by individual physiognomy from the ideal-typical features of the other disciples. The iconography of this painting suggests a hierarchy: Christ is on the top, then the two main apostles, Peter and Paul, and then the other ten. The iconographic features of Peter and Paul connect them both to Christ and to the college of the apostles at the same time. The expression of their position in the middle of the hierarchy is apparent.

⁵¹⁴ A. Ferrua, "Qui filius diceris et pater inveniris" (1961).

⁵¹⁵ V. Fiocchi-Nicolai, F. Bisconti, D. Mazzolenzi, *The Christian Catacombs of Rome* (2002²), 23; U. M. Fasola B., *The catacombs of Domitilla* (2002³), 74-5.

The examples of the 'apostolic college' type mentioned above originate from the second half of the fourth century. Although the dating of the wall paintings in the Domitilla catacomb seems to be complicated, (two stylistically different examples of wall paintings occur next to one another on the same wall in one of the cubicles of the Domitilla catacomb⁵¹⁶), it is agreed that the abovementioned images of Christ with the apostles were all made around or after the middle of the fourth century.⁵¹⁷

This diversity in the iconography of the apostles complies with the broader contexts of the same period. The period, which extends from the second half of the fourth to the beginning of the fifth century, is considered the last figurative phase of Roman catacombs. This period of catacomb decoration is characterized by an enhanced interest in portraiture. At that time, in catacomb painting there was a general tendency for the evolvment of an individual and physiognomic representation of figures. For example, the image of Petronilla, in the *arcosolium* of Veneranda⁵¹⁸ in the same Catacomb of Domitilla 'presents the characteristics, the immobile expression and the typical hairstyle of portraits dated 360-370.'⁵¹⁹

This individualising tendency prevailed in the case of Christ himself and of the two main apostles, Peter and Paul, too. An important stage in this iconographic progress is the bust of Christ located in the centre of the ceiling of the *Cubiculum Leonis* at the Catacomb of Commodilla in Rome.⁵²⁰ (Figure 77) It was the second half of the fourth century when faces of Peter and Paul acquired peculiar character and became unmistakable through this general tendency of iconographic development.

The individualised representation of Peter and Paul, and their arrangement in this way, i.e. Peter on the left, Paul on the right, also appeared on other kinds of artefacts in the fourth century, including relief carvings, gold glasses, lamps, gems, bronzes, ivories, ceramic wares.⁵²¹ The epitaph of Asellus is an excellent example of

⁵¹⁶ L. V. Rutgers, *Subterranean Rome* (2000), 51.

⁵¹⁷ U. M. Fasola B., *The catacombs of Domitilla* (2002³), 51. 53. 63; V. Fiocchi-Nicolai, F. Bisconti, D. Mazzolenzi, *The Christian Catacombs of Rome* (2002²), 23; U. M. Fasola B., *The catacombs of Domitilla* (2002³), 87.

⁵¹⁸ U. M. Fasola B., *The catacombs of Domitilla* (2002³), 41-3.

⁵¹⁹ V. Fiocchi-Nicolai, F. Bisconti, D. Mazzolenzi, *The Christian Catacombs of Rome* (2002²), 138.

⁵²⁰ A. Nestori, *Repertorio topografico delle pitture delle catacombe romane* (1975), 142-3, note 5.

⁵²¹ R. Jensen, 'The legacy of Paul – Art' (2011), 510.

a marble plaque from the Catacomb of Hippolytus on the Via Triburtina in Rome. (Figure 78)

It was discovered in the early eighteenth century and can be found in the Vatican Museums today. It is dated to the late fourth century. The busts of Peter and Paul are engraved into the tombstone within a rectangular border. Their faces are clearly recognizable, but they are also labelled PETRVS and PAVLVS. There is a *chi-rho* monogram placed between them. (This plaque will also be mentioned in Chapter 7.4 which will study the Christogram in particular.) On the right hand side of the epitaph, there is an inscription in memory of a young boy: ASELLV BENEMBERENTI QVI VICXIT ANNV SEX MESIS OCTO DIES XXVII (to the well-deserving Asellus, who lived six years, eight months, and twenty-seven days). The portraits of Peter and Paul were probably engraved into the epitaph to ask for the intercession of the popular saints on behalf of the deceased.⁵²²

Another good example is a gold glass medallion from the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.⁵²³ (Figure 79) It was made in Rome in the late fourth century. Framed by a circular gold border, Peter and Paul stand facing frontally on both sides of a gem-studded column supporting the *chi-rho* monogram.

Their names are inscribed behind them, PETRVS and PAVLVS. Peter, with short hair and beard, stands on the left, his right foot extending over the border. Paul is depicted as balding and with a long beard. The presence of the column in the composition is extraordinary. It is interpreted as a representation of the Church over which the two apostles have been given authority. As such, the composition may be understood as a symbol of the *traditio legis*.⁵²⁴

The appearance of the individualised images of Peter and Paul coincided with the first evidence for the cult of the two apostles, which originates from 354. This first documentary evidence about the inauguration, or *inventio*, of the cult is to be found in the *Depositio Martyrum* published by Furius Dionysius Filocalus in his Chronography of 354 (also known as Calendar of 354), in the early years of the pa-

⁵²² J. Spier (ed.), *Picturing the Bible* (2007), 246.

⁵²³ Glass, gold leaf; diam. 9.9 cm, w. 0.6 cm; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Rogers Fund, 1916 (16.174.3)

⁵²⁴ J. Spier (ed.), *Picturing the Bible* (2007), 247; K. Marsengill, 'Bowl Base with Saints Peter and Paul' (2011), 85-6.

pacy of Liberius.⁵²⁵ It says: *Petri in Catacumbas et Pauli Ostense, Tusco et Basso cons[ulibus] A.D. 258.*⁵²⁶ Although the text mentions neither the Vatican Hill, nor the Constantinian basilica as the site of the Peter-cult, it is argued that the *Depositio Martyrum* is accurate and reflects the mid-fourth-century reality of suburban veneration of the apostles.⁵²⁷ It is also noted that scenes of both the martyrdom of Peter and the martyrdom of Paul appeared on Roman sarcophagi only after 354.⁵²⁸

6.3.2. The 'concordia apostolorum' type

There is another, very similar depiction of Christ accompanied by the two main apostles, Peter and Paul, which represent them *in concordia*.⁵²⁹ This type of iconography developed in parallel with the image of the apostolic college, yet independently.

a. Examples

There is a fresco of Christ between Peter and Paul in Cubicle No. 9 in the Catacomb of Via Latina in Rome, which is dated to the middle of the fourth century, or possibly somewhat later. (Figure 80) In the middle of the picture, there is Christ on a throne, with a nimbus. He holds an open scroll in his right hand in the manner of addressing (*adlocutio*) an audience. Peter stands on the right and Paul on the left. Paul also holds a scroll in his right hand, in the same way as Christ. The figures of Peter and Paul are obviously differentiated by the common physiognomic features. Peter has a short, while the balding Paul a longer, pointed beard, however, Peter's visibility is limited.⁵³⁰ This particular wall painting is probably the earliest example of the two apostles standing *in concordia* in catacomb painting. It is held to have been realised in the later stages of the pictorial cycles' development in this catacomb.⁵³¹

There is another image of this type in the Catacomb of Peter and Marcellinus, whose construction began in the third century and extended into the fourth

⁵²⁵ M. R. Salzman, *On Roman Time* (1990), 46.

⁵²⁶ R. Valentini, G. Zucchetti (eds), *Codice topografico della città di Roma*, vol. 2 (1942), 19.

⁵²⁷ C. Pietri, *Roma christiana* (1976), 366-80.

⁵²⁸ J. M. Huskinson, *Concordia Apostolorum* (1982), 81.

⁵²⁹ O. Zwiernlein, *Petrus und Paulus in Jerusalem und Rom* (2013), 122-8.

⁵³⁰ A. Nestori, *Repertorio topografico delle pitture delle catacombe romane*, (1975); A. Ferrua, *Le pitture della nuova catacomba di via Latina* (1960), plate 108.

⁵³¹ J. M. Huskinson, *Concordia Apostolorum* (1982), 9.

and fifth centuries. This spectacular fresco has already been studied in connection with the question of martyr representations in Sopianae. (Figure 71, in Chapter 5.4.2.) In the top centre of the picture, a bearded and nimbed Christ sits enthroned. Paul stands on the left and Peter on the right. Below them, four smaller figures can be seen. They are Tiburtius, Gorgonius, Peter and Marcellinus, the martyrs with whom this catacomb was particularly associated. The fresco, which is in the vault of a cubiculum, originates from the late fourth century or possibly, even from the first decade of the fifth century.⁵³²

It is supposed that, similarly to the aforementioned mosaic in the Catacomb of Domitilla (Figure 76), the artist adapted the design here from a Roman basilica. The elongated figures may indicate that the prototype was in an apse or under a dome of a church. Basilican art has been described as having influenced the pictorial art of the catacombs.⁵³³ However, since no such mosaics survive from before the second half of the fourth century, they cannot provide firm evidence for this theory.

b. Analysis

There are assumptions that the representation of Peter and Paul as a couple⁵³⁴ was not limited to Rome among early Christian artefacts. Such images also occurred outside the capital across the Roman Empire. The image of Peter and Paul in the cemetery of Sopianae would be an excellent example for the images of the *concordia apostolorum*.

F. Gerke enumerated and classified these images into three categories:

- images from the Balkans, Greece and the region of the Black Sea (e.g. Pécs, Niš, Varna),
- carvings from the Western part of the Empire (e.g. a sarcophagus from Berja, now in Madrid, c. 325-335⁵³⁵),
- the '*vexillum crucis*' type (e.g. Lateran Sarcophagus no. 171, dated to about 350⁵³⁶).⁵³⁷

⁵³² A. Nestori, *Repertorio topografico delle pitture delle catacombe romane* (1975), 50, note 5.

⁵³³ J. M. Huskinson, *Concordia Apostolorum* (1982), 9.

⁵³⁴ [...] *nomina quisque Petri pariter Paulique requiris* (Damasus, *Epigrammata* 20, 2, in A. Ferrua (ed.), *Epigrammata Damasiana* (1942).)

⁵³⁵ M. Sotomayor, *Sarcófagos romano-cristianos de España* (1975), 101-7, plates 4.1 and 29.

⁵³⁶ F. Deichmann (ed.), *Repertorium der christlich-antiken Sarkophagen*, vol 3 (1967), 3448, no. 49.

⁵³⁷ F. Gerke, "'Duces in militia Christi'" (1954), 95.

The third type is also called '*crux invicta*.' Peter and Paul appear in conjunction with the *crux invicta* in the *concordia apostolorum* type on the so-called 'Tree' Sarcophagus (also known as Lateran 164).⁵³⁸ (Figure 82) Peter and Paul are depicted on the northern wall of the burial chamber, which is named after them in the Sopianae cemetery. (Figure 17) Peter stands on the right, and Paul on the left of the central Christogram. Their identification is evident on the basis of the iconography, which had already been developed by the last decades of the fourth century. Both of the apostles point towards the Christogram with their right hands. Their signalling gesture⁵³⁹ recalls the motion depicted on the aforementioned wall painting in the Catacomb of Peter and Marcellinus. (Figure 71) In that picture, Peter and Paul stretch out their right hands in the same way as in the back wall of the SS Peter and Paul Chamber in Sopianae. Although the lower part of the wall painting is quite damaged, it appears that Paul clasps a scroll (*rotulus*) in his other hand, while Peter holds the edge of his garment with his left hand.⁵⁴⁰

A very similar composition with the Christogram enclosed by Peter and Paul in a floral background can be found not far from Sopianae, in the ancient city of Naissus (today Niš in Serbia). (Figure 83) In the Jagodin Mala area of the city, there is a funnel-vaulted tomb constructed of brick and plastered with a thin layer of fresco material. It was built in the second half of the fourth century. The orientation is east–west, with the entrance on the east side. The decoration of the eastern wall holds valuable information for this study.

In that wall, above the entrance, there is a painted Christogram with the letters *alpha* and *omega*, surrounded by a garland of palm leaves. A standing figure is painted on either side of the entrance. To the left, there is a bearded man in a long garment and sandals. He holds an open book in his hands. To the right of the en-

⁵³⁸ The 'Tree' Sarcophagus with Anastasis (Vatican Museums, inv. 28591) from the hypogeum of the Confessio in St Paul Outside the Walls, dated at 350-400. (J. M. Huskinson, *Concordia Apostolorum* (1982), 20; D. Cartlidge, J. Elliott, *Art and Christian Apocrypha* (2001), 144).

⁵³⁹ L. Kötsche, 'Hand II (ikonographisch)' (1986).

⁵⁴⁰ J. Koller, *Prolegomena in historiam Episcopatus Quinqueecclesiarum* (1804), plate 11; I. Henszlmann, 'A pécsi sírkamra „cubiculum“' [The burial chamber 'cubiculum' in Pécs] (1876), 136; Z. Kádár, *Pannónia ókeresztény emlékeinek ikonográfiája* (L'iconografia dei monumenti paleocristiani della Pannonia) (1939), 4; F. Fülep, *Sopianae* (1984), 38; K. Hudák, L. Nagy, *A Fine and Private Place* (2009), 41-4.

trance, there is a similar figure conferring blessing with his right hand and holding a scroll in his left hand. Vegetation and a railing are painted round the figures.⁵⁴¹

On the basis of composition and iconography, the figures have been identified as Peter and Paul. The stylistic and iconographic resemblance between the wall paintings in the burial chambers in Naissus and Sopianae is evident. It has been evinced that the frescoes in the pagan tombs and in the earliest Christian tombs in the territory of Serbia are iconographically and stylistically affined with the tombs discovered between the Adriatic and the Black Sea, along the Salona–Sirmium–Viminacium–Durostorum–Tomis line. The decoration of the tombs also shows similarities to those found in tombs located in the regions north and south of it, like in Thessalonike, Naissus and Sopianae. For this reason, it has been proposed that since the territory of Serbia lies in the geographical centre of this tradition of tomb building and decoration, it is possible that ‘the studios in which the fresco decoration of the Late Antique and early Christian tombs in the Balkans was created were located in this region.’⁵⁴²

6.4. The Images of Peter and Paul in the SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber

The SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber in Sopianae was deservedly named after the apostles Peter and Paul on its discovery at the end of the eighteenth century, because their images dominate the main wall of the room. (Figure 17) Their full-length images have the greatest size among the decorative elements of the whole burial chamber and they are by far the largest human figures in the decoration. At the same time, they are clearly related to the centrally positioned Christogram. (Figure 20) As being placed somewhat below it, they look up on it and point to it upwards with their hands. The Christogram’s supremacy is evidently expressed by the triangle composition of the three images. (Figure 18) The significance of the Christogram, which has a symbolic character (on the significance of the Christogram, see

⁵⁴¹ Slobodan Drča, ‘Tomb with Frescoes’, in D. Srejskić (ed.), *Roman imperial towns and palaces in Serbia* (1993), 289.

⁵⁴² D. Srejskić, ‘Painting’, in *ibid.*, 279.

Chapter 7.2), is further enhanced by the fact that the iconographically (and probably theologically) remarkably important apostle figures are subordinated to it.

This hierarchical arrangement of the three elements of the composition resembles the abovementioned wall painting from the SS Peter and Marcellinus Catacomb in Rome. This image was cited as an example of the *concordia apostolorum* type. (Figure 71 and Chapter 6.3.2) Similarly to that composition, there is an evident subordination of the two main apostles under the reign of Christ here, too. However, the resemblance of the two compositions prevails only to a degree: in the Catacomb of Peter and Marcellinus, Christ is represented as a bearded male figure, not by a Christogram, and there are four further saints painted in the lower level of the pyramid-shaped composition. (The possible connections between the SS Peter and Marcellinus Catacomb and this burial chamber in Sopiana were also investigated in Chapter 5.4.2, which concerns the question of martyr relics in Sopiana.)

Because of their size and position, the viewer's attention is naturally drawn to the two apostles, on entering the burial chamber (Figure 12) and a clear reference is evoked to their identity through the identifiable iconographic features and the recognizable type of composition. This hierarchically organized trio of the Christogram, Peter and Paul was common in the Christian artefacts of the fourth century throughout the Roman Empire, as it has been demonstrated above.

This type of composition which had not appeared before the middle of the fourth century also helped the dating of this burial chamber. Although dating it to the fifth century had been known in the nineteenth century,⁵⁴³ an academic consensus was reached in favour of the supposition of an earlier building in the twentieth century. It was suggested that it was erected in the 330-340s,⁵⁴⁴ but there is another possible dating for 366-384.⁵⁴⁵ Relying on the fact that the composition of the Christogram flanked by the apostles Peter and Paul became popular and widespread only during the reign of Pope Damasus (366-384), K. Hudák excluded the

⁵⁴³ J. Strzygowsky, 'Das frühe und das hohe Mittelalter' (1893), 56-7.

⁵⁴⁴ O. Szőnyi, 'A pécsi ó-keresztény temető sírkamrái és kápolnája' [The Burial Chambers and the Chapel of the Early Christian Cemetery in Pécs] (1929), 543; E. Dyggve, 'Das Mausoleum in Pécs' (1935), 12.

⁵⁴⁵ Z. Kádár, *Pannonia ókeresztény emlékeinek ikonográfiája* [The Iconography of Early Christian Monuments in Pannonia] (1939), 9; *id.*, 'A Triumphus-eszme a pécsi ókeresztény héroon egyik freskóján' [The *Triumphus* Idea on One of the Frescoes of the Early Christian Heroon in Pécs] (1940-41), 68.

possibility of a dating earlier than these decades.⁵⁴⁶ (For more on the activity of Pope Damasus in the propagation of the saints' cult, see Subchapters 5.1.3 and 5.2.1.) The dating for the last two decades of the fourth century is supported by several other scholars who based their hypotheses on different types of arguments (archaeological, art historical or literal arguments).⁵⁴⁷

⁵⁴⁶ K. Hudák, L. Nagy, *A Fine and Private Place* (2009), 43, esp. note 112.

⁵⁴⁷ F. Gerke, 'A passioszarkofágok kormeghatározása' [The Dating of the Passion Sarcophagi] (1939), 50-4; G. Gosztonyi, *A pécsi ókeresztény temető* [The Early Christian Cemetery in Pécs] (1943), 20; F. Fülep, *Sopianae* (1984), 160; *id.*, Z. Bachmann, A. Pintér, *Sopianae-Pécs ókeresztény emlékei* [The Early Christian Monuments of Sopianae-Pécs] (1988), 27; E. Tóth, 'Sopianae a késő császárkorban' [Sopianae in the Late Imperial Era] (2003), 32; G. Heidl, 'A pécsi I. számú sírkamra Jónás-képe' [The Jonah picture in Burial Chamber No. I in Pécs] (2005), 212-5; O. Gábor, *Sopianae késő antik (északi) temetőjének épületei és festményei* [The Buildings and Paintings of the Late Antique (Northern) Cemetery in Sopianae] (2008), 133.

7. The Christogram

In the process of the religious identification of the tombs in Sopianae, one of the most important criteria is the presence of the Christogram. It seems more significant in the SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber, since there are two Christograms in central position of the decoration: one on the main wall opposite the entrance and another in the centre of the vault. Thus, this chapter aims to demonstrate the iconographic significance of the Christogram in early Christianity in order to create a frame for the study of the chamber. First, the origin of the symbol will be discussed and then several relevant occurrences will be mentioned from Roman catacombs. The Christograms of the SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber will be interpreted in relation to the other Christograms in the Sopianae cemetery and will be placed in a broader context of Late Antiquity.

7.1. The *nomina sacra* and the Origin of the Christogram

The Christogram is a monogram which abbreviates the Greek name of Christ with two letters. There were two popular forms of the Christological monogram, and a third one which occurs only sporadically.⁵⁴⁸ (Figure 81) The first type forms a cross with looped *rho* on its top stem. It is also called *staurogram*. The second type, which is called the 'Constantinian' type, is formed by the two letters *chi* and *rho* in such a way that the letter *chi* is superimposed over *rho*. This second combined character usually has six rays (like an asterisk), with the head-loop of the *rho* appearing on the top-centre ray.⁵⁴⁹ The third type of Christogram combines the two initials of the Greek name of *Iesous Christos* in such a way that a large *iota* is placed into the mid-

⁵⁴⁸ D. Mazzolenzi, 'Monogramma', in F. Bisconti (ed.), *Temi di iconografia paleocristiana* (2000), 221-3.

⁵⁴⁹ V. Fiocchi-Nicolai; F. Bisconti; D. Mazzoleni, *The Christian Catacombs of Rome* (2002²), 160; D. Mazzolenzi, 'Origine e cronologia dei monogrammi riflessi nelle iscrizioni dei Musei Vaticani' (1997).

dle of the letter *chi*. The occurrence of this form is more infrequent than the former two types and there is evidence for it only from the pre-Constantinian period.⁵⁵⁰

Although such abbreviated monograms are less impressive than other, more magnificent early Christian artefacts such as catacomb paintings or marble reliefs on sarcophagi, they are visual and physical expressions of religious devotion and were applied as essential elements of decoration. The Christogram can be regarded as a 'hybrid phenomenon' similarly to the so-called *nomina sacra* that combine textual and visual features and functions in a specific way. The graphic symbols of words with key significance were written in a distinctive manner to designate them visually and reverentially in the surrounding text.⁵⁵¹

Nomina sacra is the name of the group of four epithets (amongst others like those for God and the Spirit) which consists of the most significant words referring to God and Jesus in early Christianity. These are *Theos*, *Kyrios*, *Iesous* and *Christos*. In Christian texts, these four words had been treated as *nomina sacra* earlier and much more consistently than any of the other words, which were given a similar treatment only later. However, it is also important to note that they were also consistently *not* treated as *nomina sacra* (even in the same manuscripts) when having other referents. This suggests that the designated forms for these four words represent the early Christians' reverence for Jesus and God. The use of the *nomina sacra*, which functioned as visual expressions of piety, reflects a definite Christological orientation in early Christian devotion.⁵⁵²

The *nomina sacra* forms characterize Christian texts in general, but appear more typically and consistently in biblical texts and less regularly and consistently in some other types of texts (e.g., private letters, magical texts, liturgical texts). However, the dominant pattern of their occurrences is obvious in literal sources and indicates a scribal practice that became remarkably rapidly widespread.⁵⁵³ The first

⁵⁵⁰ A. Ferrua, *La polemica antiariana nei monumenti paleocristiani* (1991), 43.

⁵⁵¹ L. Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts* (2006), 121.

⁵⁵² *Ibid.*, 125.

⁵⁵³ Markus Vinzent proposed that the *staurogram* and the *nomina sacra* might have originated in Marcion's single gospel manuscript. As there are no analogies in Jewish and pagan texts, their consistent usage in early Christian gospel writings may have become widespread from this manuscript in the second and third centuries. (M. Vinzent, 'Earliest 'Christian' Art is Jewish Art', forthcoming).

occurrences of the *nomina sacra* are from the late second century.⁵⁵⁴ However, L. Hurtado, one of the experts of the area asserts that an even earlier dating is possible, concluding that these devices represent the earliest existing expression of 'Christian visual culture'.⁵⁵⁵

7.2. The *staurogram* and the Christogram

It was supposed previously that the above mentioned Constantinian type of the Christogram, which combines the letters *chi* and *rho* had a precedence over the other, *staurogram* type, which consists of a *tau* and a *rho*.⁵⁵⁶ On the contrary, the biblical papyri P45, P66 and P75 evidence datable instances of the *tau-rho* symbol before Constantine, which means that its employment appeared significantly earlier than that of the *chi-rho*. As it was already noted several decades ago, the earliest Jesus monogram appears to be the *tau-rho*, not the *chi-rho* in light of the manuscript evidence.⁵⁵⁷

As the more precise name of *staurogram* suggests, this earlier type of the Christogram referred primarily to Jesus' cross and crucifixion. In the earliest stage, it was not essentially a symbol for Jesus in general or for a divine name, but had a more specific reference to Jesus' death on the cross as it stood in the texts for the Greek words of *stauros* or *staurothanai*. The letters *tau* and *rho* were interwoven in such a way that they made a kind of pictogram rendering the image of a man's head upon a cross.⁵⁵⁸ In this case, it is assumed that the *staurogram* was associated with the *chi-rho* type Christogram only later with aetiological intents.⁵⁵⁹

According to another explanation, the roots of the *staurogram* can be found in Jewish tradition. Both forms of the Hebrew letter *taw* (either +, or X) were signs for Yahweh in the Hebrew and Jewish scriptures, which were later expanded into a

⁵⁵⁴ E. Dinkler, 'Kreuzzeichen und Kreuz' (1962), 105.

⁵⁵⁵ L. Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts* (2006), 139.

⁵⁵⁶ M. Sulzberger, 'Le symbole de la croix et les monogrames de Jesus chez les premiers chretiens' (1925).

⁵⁵⁷ K. Aland, 'Neue Neutestamentliche Papyri II' (1963-64), 78; L. Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts* (2006), 143.

⁵⁵⁸ R. Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (2000), 138; L. Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts* (2006), 154; M. Vinzent, 'Earliest "Christian" Art is Jewish Art' (2016).

⁵⁵⁹ M. Black, 'The Chi-Rho Sign' (1970), 327.

special messianic and eschatological connotation. All the three characters, namely the Hebrew *taw*, the Greek *chi* and the cross (*stauros*) have a similar form, and equally had more than one graphic appearance in Antiquity.⁵⁶⁰

When a loop was added to the first form (+), it became a *staurogram*, and when to the second (X), it became the Constantinian type of Christogram. It is easily imaginable that the Oriental and Hellenized people, who were receptive to the symbolism of signs and numbers, recognized more than a sheer coincidence in the overlap of the three characters of *taw*, *chi* and the cross.⁵⁶¹ If this was the case, then Yahweh's sign of ownership and protection was transmuted into the sign of Christ's Passion, which designates not simply *Christus*, but *Christus crucifixus*.⁵⁶²

This emblem of a crucified person was also a victory-sign, a *tropaion* at the same time. As Prudentius wrote about Christ's cross in his poem:

*dic tropaeum passionis,
dic triumphalem crucem,
pange uexillum, notatis
quod refulget frontibus!* (Prudentius, *Cathemerinon* 9.83, in CSEL 61, 54).

The Christogram was to represent Christ's victory over death by employing the main elements of current imperial iconography.⁵⁶³ Since a religious content was bestowed upon a victory sign, which was used both in the Roman army as well as in a funerary context, it could mediate a strong promise for the individual's salvation in a symbolic way. However, because the Christogram was used as an official imperial sign after the reign of Constantine the Great, its usage also expressed a certain level of loyalty to the emperor and to the Roman state.⁵⁶⁴

The parallels between the *staurogram* and Christ's monogram suggest a strong connection between Christ's cross and his name. This connection has been

⁵⁶⁰ *Taw*: X or +

Chi: X or +

Stauros: T or +

E. Dinkler, 'Kreuzzeichen und Kreuz' (1962), 104.

⁵⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶² M. Black, 'The Chi-Rho Sign' (1970), 327.

⁵⁶³ This adoption is even more obvious in those cases where the eagle of Jupiter and personifications of the sun and the moon were added to the Christogram, flanked by them in the image. This composition suggests that Christ is an almighty conqueror and a powerful ruler. (Cf., J. Deckers, 'Constantine the Great and Early Christian Art' (2007), 107.

⁵⁶⁴ K. Hudák, L. Nagy, *A Fine and Private Place* (2009), 72.

interpreted via a sacramental approach.⁵⁶⁵ (There is more on the sacramental character of early Christian artefacts in Chapter 3.6.) The origin of this hypothesis can be found in the Pauline soteriology and sacramental theology. Paul argues in his letter to the Romans:

Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. (Romans 6:3-5)

The faithful's partaking in Christ's death means that they will share in his resurrection as well. This happens via the baptism in Jesus' name.⁵⁶⁶ In the sacramental thought, Christ's crucifixion, the baptism in his name and the individual's salvation (through being marked by his sign in an eschatological sense)⁵⁶⁷ are all connected and integrated in the same way, as is united and symbolically expressed in the *staurogram* or in the Christogram.

This sacramental interpretation is supported by the note that can be found in Tertullian's work, *Against Marcion*, according to which Marcion⁵⁶⁸ made a sign on the forehead in the form of a cross as part of his baptismal rite. Tertullian insists that by doing so, Marcion did not introduce a new symbol distinct from Judaism, but only followed the *Book of Ezekiel* (9:4):

For this same letter Tau of the Greeks, which is our T, has the appearance of the cross, which he [Ezekiel] foresaw we should have on our foreheads in the true and catholic Jerusalem. (Tertullian, Adversus Marcionem, 3.22)

Regardless of which explanation is more accurate, the importance, which was given to Jesus' crucifixion in the 'lived religion' of the early Christians from at least as early as the late second century, is manifest. The Christogram proved to be a suitable symbol to mediate all these contents publicly in an appropriate way.

⁵⁶⁵ E. Dinkler, 'Kreuzzeichen und Kreuz' (1962), 105.

⁵⁶⁶ *Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38) Were you baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, so no one can say that you were baptized in my name. (1 Cor 1:13-15)*

⁵⁶⁷ E. Dinkler, 'Kreuzzeichen und Kreuz' (1962), 107.

⁵⁶⁸ W. Löhr, 'Markion' (2012).

7.3. The Iconography of the Christogram and Examples

The use of the Christogram was widespread in early Christian artefacts. The Christogram occurs on a wide range of artefacts and decorations: funerary inscriptions, commemorative or votive plaques, carvings, mosaics on side walls or pavements, different kinds of wall paintings, liturgical furnishings and devices, and in the different buildings of the cult.

There are two different types of occurrences in the catacomb inscriptions. In the first type, the Christogram appears rather as a decorative symbol apart from the text, while the occurrences of the second type are innate parts of the texts, where they appear specifically as an abbreviation of the name Christ.⁵⁶⁹

The Christogram is the second most popular iconographic element after birds in the inscriptions of the Roman catacombs. (It appears on 24% of all plaques with images.) The frequency of the *chi-rho* monogram increased greatly after the reign of Constantine.⁵⁷⁰ There is good evidence that in the catacombs of Domitilla and of Callistus, for which dates of ancient excavation are approximately known, fourth-century regions contain twice and four times as many Christograms as regions from the third century, respectively.⁵⁷¹

The Christogram also appears on the wall paintings in Roman catacombs several times. There are a significant number of cases when the Christogram occurs flanked by *alpha* and *omega*.⁵⁷² The first and last letters of the Greek alphabet were apocalyptic symbols which are mentioned in the *Book of Revelations*.⁵⁷³ The letters, *alpha* and *omega* occur with both the cross-form as well as the X-form types of the Christogram.⁵⁷⁴ The combination of the monogram of Christ and the apocalyptic

⁵⁶⁹ J. Kreigerin, 'Remembering Children in the Roman Catacombs' (2013), 609, note 13.

⁵⁷⁰ The first official promotion of the Christogram by Constantine happened in 312/313, when it occurred on an emission of denarii. On these coins, Licinius was depicted as Jupiter, Maximinus as Sol and Constantine as a general. (A. Alföldi, *Nagy Konstantin megtérése* [The Conversion of Constantine the Great] (1943), 32-3).

⁵⁷¹ J. Kreigerin, 'Remembering Children in the Roman Catacombs' (2013), 609.

⁵⁷² Aldo Nestori lists 16 occurrences in the catacombs of Rome, among which the Christogram is flanked by *alpha* and *omega* in five cases. (A. Nestori, *Repertorio topografico delle pitture delle catacombe romane* (1975), 207).

⁵⁷³ *Ap.* 1:8; 21:6; 22:13. E. Lohmeyer, 'Alpha und Omega' (1950).

⁵⁷⁴ D. Mazzolenzi, 'Alfa e omega,' in F. Bisconti (ed.), *Temi di iconografia paleocristiana*, (2000), 102-3.

letters refer to Christ as the creator of the universe and the returning judge at the end of time.⁵⁷⁵ This symbolic composition clearly mediated the assertion of Christ's divinity, though in a concise way, in the era of the controversies of Arianism.⁵⁷⁶

7.4. Christogram Surrounded by Peter and Paul

The Christogram surrounded by the apostles Peter and Paul is not a peculiarity of Sopianae. There is an occurrence of this same composition in the catacomb of Praetextatus on the Via Appia in Rome. This catacomb originally was not a specifically Christian cemetery. It was used by Christians from the third century and extensively expanded with a series of chambers in the late fourth century. There is a large *arcosolium* covered with frescoes, which takes its name from the person buried there, called Celerina.⁵⁷⁷ The paintings depict a selection of saints and other symbols, some of which are seriously damaged. On the damaged back wall, lambs and doves are visible below the Christogram. The figures of Peter and Paul stand on one side within the arch of the *arcosolium* and, on the other side, there are two martyred popes depicted.⁵⁷⁸

There is a composition with the Christogram and the apostles Peter and Paul in the Catacomb of Domitilla, which shows several similarities with the wall paintings of the SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber in Sopianae. This *arcosolium* has already been referred to in the section on the iconography of Peter and Paul in Chapter 6.3.1 (Figure 75). This *arcosolium*, called 'of the Small Apostles', contains a Christogram in the upper zone of the lunette. There is also a female *orante* figure there located between the apostles, Peter on the left and Paul on the right. Both of the apostles can be obviously differentiated by their respective distinctive features.⁵⁷⁹

Another occurrence of this type of composition can be found on a gold glass medallion produced in Rome in the late fourth century, which is treasured in the

⁵⁷⁵ Origen, *Commentarium in Ioannem*, 1. 34-5. (*Source chrétiennes* 120, 78; Paris, 1968); Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, 1. 3. 8-10. (PL 82, 76-7.)

⁵⁷⁶ A. Ferrua, *La polemica antiariana nei monumenti paleocristiani* (1991), 148.

⁵⁷⁷ L. Spera, *Il complesso di Pretestato sulla Via Appia* (2004); F. Bisconti, 'L'arcosolio di Celerina in Pretestato' (2005).

⁵⁷⁸ J. Spier, *Picturing the Bible* (2007), 267.

⁵⁷⁹ U. M. Fasola B., *The catacombs of Domitilla* (2002³), 51.

Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York today.⁵⁸⁰ (Figure 79, already mentioned in Chapter 6.3.1) The diameter of the medallion is 9.9 cm. It is framed by a circular gold border. Peter and Paul stand facing frontally, flanking a gem-studded column supporting the *chi-rho* monogram of Christ. The names of the apostles are inscribed behind them, PETRVS and PAVLVVS. Peter stands on the left, with short hair and beard. His right foot extends over the border. Paul is on the right. He is depicted as balding and with a long beard.

The original function of such gold glass vessels is not known for certain. It is supposed that they were given as gifts at special occasions during the lifetimes of individuals and then reused as tomb decoration. Later, when they were used in the catacombs, the bottoms of these bowls were embedded in the plaster to seal the *loculi*.⁵⁸¹

The composition with the Christogram, the column and the apostles are understood as the representation of the *translatio legis* and the *concordia apostolorum*. Peter and Paul have been given authority over the Church, which is symbolized by the decorated column. Regardless of whether the gold glass vessel was made for, or simply later reused in a funerary context, the latter context of the archeological finding indicates that the images of saints on it probably signified their holy protection over the deceased.⁵⁸²

The occurrence of the Christogram flanked by the apostles Peter and Paul is attested by a marble plaque also from the late fourth century which has already been mentioned in Chapter 6.3.1. (Figure 78) The object was discovered in the Catacomb of Hippolytus on the Via Tiburtina in Rome, in the early eighteenth century and can be found in the Vatican Museums today.⁵⁸³ The epitaph is named after Asellus, since on the right side of the plaque, there is an inscription commemorating a young boy: ASELLV BENEMBERTI QVI VICXIT ANNV SEX MESIS OCTO DIES XXVII (to the well-deserving Asellus, who lived six years, eight months, and twenty-seven

⁵⁸⁰ Rogers Fund, 1916 (16.174.3)

⁵⁸¹ K. Marsengill, 'Bowl Base with Saints Peter and Paul' (2011), 85.

⁵⁸² J. Spier, *Picturing the Bible* (2007), 247; K. Marsengill, 'Bowl Base with Saints Peter and Paul' (2011), 86.

⁵⁸³ Vatican Museums, inv. 28596.

days).⁵⁸⁴ The busts of Peter and Paul are engraved on the left hand side of the tombstone within a rectangular border. They are labelled PETRVS and PAVLVS. There is a *chi-rho* monogram between them. The portraits of Peter and Paul might have served as an appeal to the two apostles for their intercession on behalf of the deceased.

The Christogram occurs on artefacts not only from Rome, but it soon became a widespread symbol over the whole Roman Empire. There is a tomb in the Eastern Early Christian cemetery in Thessaloniki in which two Christograms can be found in central position similarly to the SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber in Sopianae. The tomb originates in the mid-fourth century⁵⁸⁵ and is situated in the precincts of the St. Demetrios Hospital (Part of the Museum of Byzantine Culture) today. The interior of the vaulted tomb, which measures 2 by 1.4 meters and 1.5 meters in height, is decorated with wall paintings mainly imitating precious marbles of various sorts and colours. In the centre of the curved top of the western wall, there is a depiction of a fine monogram of Christ within a circle. (Figure 84) The Christogram is painted in bright yellow and is inscribed in a red circle. To the right and the left of the Christogram the apocalyptic letters *alpha* and *omega* are depicted, also in yellow. The rest of the tympanum is painted off-white with brown veining, while vertical black lines indicate the joints in the marble panels. There is a second Christogram on the vaulted ceiling, which is decorated with coloured rectangular panels.⁵⁸⁶

The use of the Christogram is less frequent than the cross in the wall paintings of the tombs of Thessaloniki. In the iconography of the early Christian tombs in Thessaloniki, the Christogram is typically surrounded by a foliate wreath, however, in this instance, it is enclosed by a circle, which probably plays a similar iconographic role, just in a stylized fashion.⁵⁸⁷

⁵⁸⁴ J. Spier, *Picturing the Bible* (2007), 246.

⁵⁸⁵ A coin minted in Thessaloniki in 340-50 was found in the plaster of the *pulvinus*, which dates the construction of the tomb.

⁵⁸⁶ D. Makropoulou, 'Tomb Painting with Christogram' (2011), 122.

⁵⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 123.

7.5. The Christogram in Sopiana

The Christogram occurs in Sopiana's Late Antique cemetery several times as it was a general phenomenon in such contexts in the second half of the fourth century. First, a bronze object and an incision will be mentioned, and then the painted examples of the Christogram will be enumerated. The first list of Christograms found in the territory of Hungary was published by B. Czobor in 1879.⁵⁸⁸ At the time, he listed only nine occurrences. At the end of the twentieth century, E. Tóth categorized the Christograms in lamp holding chains excavated in Pannonia.⁵⁸⁹ A thorough collection and analysis of this symbol was provided by O. Gábor in 2008.⁵⁹⁰

One of the most significant objects excavated in the cemetery of Sopiana is a bronze Christogram with 8.5 cm diameter.⁵⁹¹ (Figure 52) It was found by the archaeologist G. Kárpáti in the soil layer above the Burial Chamber No. V in October 2000.⁵⁹² Today, it is treasured in the Janus Pannonius Museum in Pécs, Hungary.⁵⁹³ Since it was found in a secondary position, its exact dating is uncertain. It must have been used sometime in the fourth century.

The Constantinian type Christogram is flanked by the Greek letters *alpha* and the small *omega*. The shape, the material and the elaboration of the object suggest lack of uniqueness. There are several similar objects found in Pannonia and around the Roman Empire, which were used as decorating links in a chain holding a lamp. One of the closest parallels to this is a Christogram decorated with small buttons, at the present time held in the Hungarian National Museum.⁵⁹⁴

⁵⁸⁸ B. Czobor, 'Kiadatlan őskeresztény emlékek a Magyar Nemzeti Múzeumban' [Unpublished Paleo-Christian Remains in the Hungarian National Museum] (1879).

⁵⁸⁹ E. Tóth, 'Et lux perpetua luceat ei' (1989-1990); *id.*, 'Késő római sír Tihanyból' [A Late Roman Grave in Tihany] (1994).

⁵⁹⁰ O. Gábor, 'Christograms from the northern late roman cemetery of Sopiana (Pécs)' (2008).

⁵⁹¹ Its significance was truly highlighted when it was chosen as the official emblem of the World Heritage Site and the Visitor Centre in Pécs, and in this way, this Christogram became the symbol of the early Christian monuments of Sopiana in general.

⁵⁹² Z. Katona Győr, 'Az első keresztények a Dél-Dunántúlon az őskeresztény temetők tükrében – Sopiana' [First Christians in Southern Transdanubia in the light of Paleo-Christian cemeteries – Sopiana] (2000), 71.

⁵⁹³ Its increase catalogue number in the Janus Pannonius Museum is 7/2000.

⁵⁹⁴ Its catalogue number in the Hungarian National Museum is 1874.636. Secondary literature on it: B. Czobor, 'Kiadatlan őskeresztény emlékek a Magyar Nemzeti Múzeumban' [Unpublished Paleo-Christian Remains in the Hungarian National Museum] (1879), 179; *id.*, 'Rövid közlemények' [Brief Notices] (1883), 242-3; L. Nagy, 'Pannonia Sacra' (1938), 148; E. Tóth, 'Frühbyzantinisches Lampen-

Christograms also appear in several graves and burial chambers in Sopiana's cemetery. There is one in the octagonal Burial Chamber No. V,⁵⁹⁵ (Figure 51) engraved into the plaster covering the stone wall.⁵⁹⁶ It is interesting that this Christogram belongs to that type of Christograms which combines the letters *iota* (I) and *chi* (X) in a star-like form. The incised sign has been dated to the second building phase of the burial chamber, namely to the first decades of the fifth century.⁵⁹⁷

The remains of a painted Christogram are visible in the so-called Early Christian Mausoleum (or less known as Burial Chamber No. XXXIII), which was excavated by F. Fülep in 1975-1976.⁵⁹⁸ (Figure 41) There, the Christogram was encircled by a red medallion, whose nether part and the lower stems of the Christogram's letters can still be seen above a niche on the eastern wall. (Figure 42) Both the medallion and the Christogram itself show an exceptionally sophisticated elaboration. The concentric circles of the medallion are designed with geometrical precision. The Christogram is well separated from the medallion. Its letters' typeface has serifs; their appearance is similar to that of the late Roman typeface of *capitula actuariaria*.⁵⁹⁹ This design of the Christogram is different from the one to be found in the largely contemporaneous SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber where the letters of the Christogram take the more schematic shape of spokes in a circle. (See the next subchapter, Chapter 7.6.)

The Christogram is surrounded by blades of grass and in the upper band on the wall, there are semicircular garlands decorated with pendulous red ribbons. The surrounding floral elements have been interpreted as the symbol of Paradise, while the garlands ornamented with ribbons as the enhancers of the heavenly sphere's

hängeglied' (1977), 148-9; E. Thomas, 'Das frühe Christentum in Pannonien im Lichte der archäologischen Funde' (1982), 271; D. Gáspár (2002), 140; P. Cséfalvay, *A magyar kereszténység ezer éve: Hungariae Christianae Millennium* (2002), 15.

⁵⁹⁵ G. Kárpáti, 'A pécsi V. számú sírkamra' [Burial Chamber No V in Pécs] (2002); K. Hudák, L. Nagy, *A Fine and Private Place* (2009), 62-3.

⁵⁹⁶ The Christogram on the wall was first published by Olivér Gábor ('Ókeresztény jellegek a pécsi késő antik temetőben (Frühchristliche Merkmale des spätantiken Gräbefelders von Pécs)' (2007), 367, plate 1.

⁵⁹⁷ O. Gábor, *Sopiana késő antik (északi) temetőjének épületei és festményei* [The Buildings and Paintings of the Late Antique (Northern) Cemetery in Sopiana] (2008), 166-7.

⁵⁹⁸ F. Fülep, 'A pécsi ókeresztény mauzóleum ásátása' [The excavations of the Early Christian Mausoleum in Pécs] (1977); D. Gáspár, *Christianity in Roman Pannonia* (2002), 78-82.

⁵⁹⁹ O. Gábor, *Sopiana késő antik (északi) temetőjének épületei és festményei* [The Buildings and Paintings of the Late Antique (Northern) Cemetery in Sopiana] (2008), 167.

solemnity.⁶⁰⁰ A similar composition of a Christogram above a niche in the wall can be found in the Early Christian Burial Chamber No. 5 of Serdica (today in Bistrica, near Sofia, Bulgaria),⁶⁰¹ which is dated to the early fifth century.⁶⁰²

There is a stone and brick double grave in 8 Apáca Street which was excavated by F. Fülep in 1958.⁶⁰³ The inner walls of the graves were plastered and decorated with uniform panels. The pattern forms a fence-like trellis with red and yellow flowers. In the middle of each panel is a circle crossed by two diagonal red lines.

This layout is reminiscent of the radial type Christogram, which can be found in the SS Peter and Paul Chamber, just without the loop of the *rho*. The similitude to that pattern is more explicit in the case of the northern grave, in the fragmented panel in the upper row on the western side of the grave, above the head of the deceased. (Figure 44) It is supposed that the Christogram painted here was averted by 90 degrees and the cross form of the letter *chi* was applied in this case. (For the different types of the letter, see Chapter 7.2.) However, this hypothesis is somewhat compromised by the fact that the upper part with the loop of the *rho* has perished and is not visible any more.⁶⁰⁴

In Burial Chamber No. XX, there is a similar arrangement to the former one. (Figure 45) There is a Christogram at the end of the burial chamber on the inside painted above the alleged place of the deceased's head.⁶⁰⁵ The Christogram has also been composed here in such a way that it occupies the central position in the decoration. It is placed into the tympanum formed by the gable roof of the grave and bounded from below by the latticework motif running around inside the grave.

⁶⁰⁰ K. Hudák, L. Nagy, *A Fine and Private Place* (2009), 24.

⁶⁰¹ R. Pillinger, 'Frühchristliche Malerei in der heutigen Volksrepublik Bulgarien' (1986).

⁶⁰² R. Pillinger, V. Popova, B. Zimmermann, *Corpus der spätantiken und frühchristlichen Wandmalereien Bulgariens* (1999), 64-5. 78; 'Serdica: Christogram in a Christian tomb' (1999).

⁶⁰³ F. Fülep, 'Későrómai temető Pécs – Geisler Eta u. 8. sz. alatt' [A Late Roman Cemetery at 8 Geisler Eta Street, Pécs] (1969); *id.*, *Sopiana: the history of Pécs during the Roman era* (1984), 76-87; K. Hudák, L. Nagy, *A Fine and Private Place* (2009), 15-6.

⁶⁰⁴ O. Gábor, *Sopiana késő antik (északi) temetőjének épületei és festményei* [The Buildings and Paintings of the Late Antique (Northern) Cemetery in Sopiana] (2008), 167.

⁶⁰⁵ Z. Visy, 'Cella Septichora: Előzetes beszámoló a Szt. István téren, az ókeresztény temető területén folytatott régészeti kutatásokról' [Cella Septichora: Preliminary Report on the Archaeological Research in the Area of the Early Christian Cemetery at St Stephen Square] (2006), 3-4; C. Pozsárkó, I. Tóth, Z. Visy, 'Sopiana: a *cella septichora* és környéke' [Sopiana: the *cella septichora* and Its Neighbourhood] (2007), 87.

There is a parallel with this composition of the Christogram and painted latticework found in Aquincum, Northern Pannonia. (Figure 85) The Grave No. 9 was excavated at 203 Bécsi Street in Budapest, Hungary in the 1980s. The grave was part of the western cemetery of the military town. There is a dark red latticed fence in the upper zone of the western wall and in this case, below it, there is a *chi-rho* type Christogram with *alpha* and *omega* on its two sides. The Christogram is double encircled and is flanked by a dove and floral motifs on each side.⁶⁰⁶

The abovementioned examples of the Christogram in the Late Antique cemetery of Sopianae all demonstrate that the Christogram was a well known and willingly employed symbol by the people of the town. It is equally found in both richly decorated as well as less elaborate burial chambers and graves. Different designs and typefaces were applied by different artists. The motif had a specific iconographic significance. This is palpable via the fact that the Christogram has typically central position in the iconographic programs. In several cases, this significant position was further improved by medallions or other decorative elements surrounding the Christogram, or by the closeness of a niche in the wall. The Christogram's importance is also demonstrated in Sopianae by the fact that it had a close relation to the person(s) buried in the grave or chamber. It was typically painted above their head or opposite them in the ceiling.

7.6. The Christogram in the SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber

The most famous painted Christograms of Sopianae are in the SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber. There is one in the middle of the main wall, opposite the entrance. The second one can be found in the middle of the ceiling decoration. The central position of both Christograms suggests that this symbol must have played a pre-eminent role in the iconographic structure of the burial chamber, and consequently, in the thoughts of the commissioners and the artisans.

⁶⁰⁶ J. Topál, 'Early Christian Graves in the Western Cemetery of the Military Town in Aquincum, Pannonia' (2002), 69. 76-7; P. Zsidi, O. Madarassy (eds), *Ókeresztény emlékek Aquincumban* [Early Christian Monuments in Aquincum] (2000), 33-4. 64.

One of the two Christograms is on the northern wall opposite the entrance. (Figure 20) A *chi-rho* type Christogram is encircled by a red frame of a 38 cm diameter, resembling a wheel with its spokes. In the inside of the frame, there are small green flowers which form a wreath. On each side of the Christogram, there is a man standing, pointing with their hands towards the Christogram. (Figure 18) (These two men are identified as the apostles Peter and Paul. For their iconography, see Chapter 6.2.) The Christogram is larger than the heads of these two figures and is placed a little above the level of the heads. Above the Christogram and the two figures, there is a 8-cm-wide, red band running parallel with the border streak and colourful ribbons hang on it.⁶⁰⁷

This kind of composition in a semi-circular field: a central panel (or niche in Sopiana) flanked by the apostles Peter and Paul and the Constantinian type of Christogram above, also occurs in the *arcosolium* of the 'Small Apostles' in the Roman Catacomb of Domitilla already mentioned in Chapter 6.3.1 (Figure 75).

On the relatively well preserved barrel vault of the SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber, whose area is 3.2 x 2.47 meters, there is another Christogram. (Figure 15) The damaged Christogram in black colour is painted in the middle of the rectangular area and is placed inside a wreath. (A reconstruction of this Christogram can be seen on Figure 9 and Figure 10) Around the Christogram, in the four corners, there are four medallions with a male head in each (cf. Chapter 5.4.1). The Christogram is flanked by two peacocks and two doves with spread wings on each side. The peacocks are on the shorter, the doves on the longer sides of the barrel vault. There are four lance-shaped bunches of flowers corded by a red ribbon on each side of the vault. They point towards the Christogram in the centre. The field among the Christogram's wreath and the medallions is filled with winding branches with leaves and flowers, garlands and a framed field in crimson.⁶⁰⁸

Both positions of the Christograms in this burial chamber are central and as a result, the Christograms dominate the surrounding area. On the main wall, the Christogram is painted above the architecturally significant *fenestella*. In both cases, the Christograms are encompassed by a circle and the accompanying elements of

⁶⁰⁷ K. Hudák, L. Nagy, *A Fine and Private Place* (2009), 41-4.

⁶⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 53-6; Z. Visy, 'The Paradise in the Early Christian Cemetery of Sopiana' (2014).

the decoration are also composed around the Christograms in such a way that they highlight the Christograms or point to them (e.g., the two apostles with their hands or the lance-shaped bunches with their points). Thereby, the viewer's attention is drawn unwittingly onto them and their importance is further enhanced by these artistic means.

The two occurrences of the Christogram have a special significance in this particular burial chamber, where the decoration is dominated primarily by figurative elements. There are the two apostles on the northern wall, the four male busts in the medallions on the ceiling and the two side walls are decorated with a range of biblical episodes, all with several human figures. And the non-figurative elements with rather decorative function, which are typically more abstract in early Christian wall paintings, consist here not only of colourful lines, stripes or fields, but of rich floral ornamentation and birds, too. In such an iconographic context, the symbolic letter-combination of the Christogram gains a unique significance by differing in character from the other images in the iconographic program.

When G. Heidl proposed that the image of the Good Shepherd had been in the place of the missing panel on the eastern side wall (see the discussion of the question in detail in Chapter 9), he built his argument on the hypothesized general iconographic program of this burial chamber.⁶⁰⁹ His hypothesis attributes a key role to the two Christograms as the main symbols of the crucified and risen Christ. According to this theory, two further images of Christ were added to the two Christograms in the middle panels on both side walls, namely the Christ Child on his mother's lap on the western and the hypothesized Good Shepherd on the eastern side. These four representations of Christ may have formed a cross, since the viewer standing in the geometrical centre of the rectangular room had Christ's image in front of them, above their head and just on their left and their right, in a central position in each case. The either horizontally, or vertically outlined cross may have been topped by one of the Christograms, which themselves bear a strong reference to Christ's cross (see earlier on the *staurogram* in Chapter 7.2). (Figure 14)

⁶⁰⁹ G. Heidl, 'Egy eltűnt kép nyomában' [Pursuit of a Lost Picture], unpublished; *idem*, 'Remarks on the Iconography in the 'Peter-Paul' (No. 1) Burial Chamber of Sopianae' (2014), 234-5.

If this theory is correct, the whole iconographic program of the SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber had a principally cross-centred character. The space of the room may have been divided by the aforementioned virtual crosses, and the remaining elements of the decoration were arranged in the quartered areas, which were excised by these invisible crosses. According to the logic of this hypothesis, one zone was given to each of the other four panels on the two side walls (Adam and Eve, Jonah, Noah, the Magi/the Three Youths), and the four medallions and the other decorative elements on the barrel vault were also organized in a similar way.

Heidl's hypothesis is remarkable and aims to give a comprehensive interpretation of the whole decoration in the burial chamber. According to it, the Christological message of the decoration dominated over all other layers of meaning and interpretation. In this approach, Christ and his cross are cognate and their representations become the organizing principle of the whole iconographic arrangement of the chamber. All other images would be arranged only after and in relation to the setting of Christ's images in the above mentioned cross-shaped outline.

Even if this hypothesized arrangement of images is accepted to be correct (although it is compromised by the fact that it is based on the supposed presence of the Good Shepherd's image as it will be discussed later in Chapter 9), it cannot be an exclusive interpretation of the iconographic program. The central position of both Christograms is indisputable; however, the decoration consists of many other images arranged in a sophisticated way. Therefore, different approaches seem to be essential in the interpretation, which reflect each other complementarily.

As it has been seen through the historical development of the Christogram, it was a symbol which could involve many different layers of meaning and suitably mediate them to various audiences via a variety of media. It has got a special capaciousness whereby it could gain a role in numerous 'language games' regardless of time and space in Late Antiquity. The widespread and popular character of the Christogram is exemplified in several cases in Sopianae too, and its special significance is represented in particular by the SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber.

7.7. Conclusion

The conflicts between Christians and 'pagans', which are particularly apparent in the surviving literary sources from the fourth century particularly, seem to be almost undetectable through the artefacts produced in the same period. P. Brown, who has analysed the state and the habits of the wealthier classes in Late Antiquity in one of his most recent studies, asserts that the disagreements 'might as well be happening on another planet'.⁶¹⁰ He reasons that most of the artefacts, like mosaics, statues, and silverware, which had been predominantly commissioned by the wealthier members of society, in many cases did not show clear signs of Christian identity.

However, this 'deafening silence on the religious issues', as Brown calls it,⁶¹¹ did not characterize all areas of life. Well-to-do Christians were ready to express their special religious adherence in certain circumstances. And the most significant manifestation of this was the use of the Christogram, which appeared everywhere in the domestic as well as in the public art in the fourth century. However, it is necessary to highlight that the Christogram did not occur just anywhere. Brown evinces that it appeared only in places traditionally associated with good fortune: 'on the thresholds of houses and at the center of reception rooms, flanked by the Seasons and by similar classical emblems of abundance.'⁶¹²

Following on from this remark, the process of how the Christogram took the central places on many types of decoration connected to funerary contexts seems truly intriguing. The place of the Good Fortune was occupied by the grand symbol of the saviour of the new religion. And the centrality of this symbol also requested to be surrounded by other iconographic elements, thus the seasons were changed to the main apostles in the Christian version.

These remarks on the advance of the Christogram seem to be confirmed by the examples available in the Sopianae cemetery. In the second half of the fourth century, when both the Roman town and its cemetery reached their zenith, the

⁶¹⁰ P. Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle* (2012), 204.

⁶¹¹ *Ibid.*

⁶¹² *Ibid.*

Christogram became one of the main symbols and distinctive features of the Christians in Sopianae as well. In some graves with quite humble execution and decoration the Christogram was the single and key element of the iconographic program, while in other cases, it found its place in the exuberant and complex structure of decoration. In the Early Christian Mausoleum and the SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber, the Christogram played an essential role in the whole iconographic program of the burial chamber and its significance unfolded in full in a mutual dialogue with the other images on the walls.

Having developed from the *staurogram*, the Christogram preserved the Christological, soteriological and sacramental meaning layers of Christ's cross. After becoming a main imperial emblem, its connotation was expanded by new elements of warfare and victory. In the funerary context, the interpretative palette of the Christogram was broadened by further shades, which gained their particular significance in the milieu determined by the general thoughts of death and afterlife and by the specifically Christian themes of resurrection and eternal life.

All these contents remained available during the usage of the Christogram and did not extinguish each other. A living interaction was generated between the different aspects of meaning. Therefore, the Christogram with its mutually enriching levels of meaning was capable to become a significant component in the 'language game' of Sopianae's society in the period when these funerary buildings were erected there. The Christogram proves to be another example of the exchange between non-Christian and Christian religious practices, symbols and iconographic arrangements that characterized Late Antiquity.

8. An Ambiguous Imagery: the Three Youths or the Magi?

In this section, the identification of one of the images on the western side wall of the SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber will be investigated. (Figure 11) First, the image itself will be described. After this, the different stages of the identification by nineteenth and twentieth century scholars will be outlined. Before presenting my own hypothesis to answer the question and arguing for it, some brief remarks will be made on the iconography of the two images in question, namely of the Three Youths in the Fiery Furnace and the Magi.

8.1. Historical Review of the Identification

On the western side wall of the SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber, three men are portrayed in the first field. They turn towards the next panel. (Figure 21) The main figure on the central picture panel of the wall is a woman holding an infant on her lap. (Figure 22) The last panel portrays Noah⁶¹³ in his ark. (Figure 25) The picture of the three men is not in a good condition, but it is distinctly visible that they wear trousers, red capes and probably the so called Phrygian caps, however, the outlines of the caps cannot be seen clearly. Their garments clearly suggest that they are not Romans but Oriental people. They look as if they were hurrying somewhere. According to some scholars⁶¹⁴ (J. Koller in particular from the nineteenth century)⁶¹⁵,

⁶¹³ Terbuyken, Enß, Zanella, 'Noe' (2013).

⁶¹⁴ O. Szőnyi, *A pécsi őskeresztény sírkamra* [The Paleochristian burial chamber in Pécs] (1907), 62; F. Gerke, 'Die Wandmalereien der Petrus-Paulus Katakomba in Pécs (Sopianae)' (1954), 151; A. Mócsy, 'A kereszténység kezdetei és a pogányság elhalása' [Beginnings of Christianity and the Decline of Paganism], in *id.* and J. Fitz (eds), *Pannonia régészeti kézikönyve* [Archaeological handbook of Pannonia] (1990), 264; Z. Katona Győr, 'Az első keresztények a Dél-Dunántúlon az őskeresztény temetőik tükrében – Sopianae' [First Christians in Southern Transdanubia in the light of Paleochristian cemeteries – Sopianae] (2000), 27; J. Dresken-Weiland, *Bild, Grab und Wort* (2010), 275.

they are the Magi, who are bringing bowls to the infant Jesus, depicted together with his mother in the next panel.⁶¹⁶ In their opinion, the first two pictures on the western wall belong together.

From the second half of the nineteenth century, when the pictures became a great deal less observable, it was suggested⁶¹⁷ that they are the Three Youths from the *Book of Daniel*.⁶¹⁸ (Figure 8) Later, better lighting and the restoration of the wall paintings showed that there are reddish stripes under the three figures' feet, which look like tongues of flames. (Figure 24) This fact could end any further discussion but it does not solve the problem of the orientation of the composition. The other problem is that the left one of the three figures 'has bent arms, as though they held out large, oval platters in their hands laden with their gifts.'⁶¹⁹ This fact should not be left without explanation. (Figure 9)

K. Hudák states that 'there is no indication of a double layer of painting. The painting had not been repainted.'⁶²⁰ She is right when she excludes the possibility of the palimpsest of two paintings in her monograph relating to the early Christian cemetery of Sopiana. She argues that 'the paintings decorating the Sopiana Burial chamber betray a sophisticated theological and iconographical background'.⁶²¹

The problem is that the traditional depiction of the Three Youths in the Fiery Furnace shows them frontally, standing with hands lifted in prayer (*expansis manibus*).⁶²² But in the case of Sopiana, they turn to the middle panel. G. Heidl⁶²³ thinks

⁶¹⁵ J. Koller, *Prolegomena in historiam Episcopatus Quinqueecclesiarum* (1804).

⁶¹⁶ The Magi, also referred to as the (Three) Wise Men, (Three) Kings, or Kings from the East, were a group of distinguished foreigners who visited Jesus after his birth, bringing gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. Their story can be read in *Matthew 2:1-12*. S. Heydasch-Lehmann, 'Magierhuldigung' (2010).

⁶¹⁷ I. Henszlmann, 'A pécsi sírkamra „cubiculum”' [The burial chamber cubiculum in Pécs] (1876), 37-9; Z. Kádár, 'Lineamenti dell'arte della Pannonia nell'epoca dell'antichità tarda e paleocristiana' (1969), 186; F. Fülep, A. Burger, 'Baranya megye a római korban' [County Baranya in the Roman Era] (1979), 244; E. Tóth, 'Sopiana a késő császárkorban' [Sopiana in late Roman Empire] (2001), 1129-36.

⁶¹⁸ Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are men recorded in the book of *Daniel*. In 3:19-30, their narrative describes how they were sent into a fiery furnace because of their stand to exclusively serve their God alone. By God's angel, they were delivered out of harm's way, the Babylonian king's order of execution. F. M. Kulczak-Rudiger *et al.*, 'Jünglinge im Feuerofen' (2001).

⁶¹⁹ K. Hudák, 'The Iconographical program of the wallpaintings' (2009), 55-6.

⁶²⁰ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁶²¹ K. Hudák, L. Nagy, *A Fine and Private Place* (2009), 50.

⁶²² Barbara Mazzei, 'Fanciulli ebrei', in F. Bisconti (ed.), *Temi di iconografia paleocristiana* (2000), 177-8; G. F. Snyder, *Ante Pacem* (1985), 54; T. Mathews, *The Clash of Gods* (1993), 78; R. Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (2000), 79. 82.

that they are walking up and down in the fire as it is written in the Scripture.⁶²⁴ Before pondering the possibility of this suggestion and the others, it seems useful to study the iconography of the Three Youths and the Magi in early Christian artefacts.

8.2. The Iconography of the Three Youths in the Fiery Furnace

The image of the Three Youths in the Fiery Furnace was a popular image of the Hebrew Scriptures in early Christian artefacts. It was typically painted on the vaults of the *arcosolia* in Roman catacombs or carved on the cover of the sarcophagi from the third to the early fifth century.⁶²⁵ It portrays three young men usually in the *orante* position⁶²⁶ (with hands lifted up) in the midst of overpowering flames. The structure containing these flames is normally a cubicle, which looks like an open brick oven, with arches across the front allowing us to see the leaping flames inside. However, there are instances where the fiery furnace is absent. This occurs particularly on medallions when the scene is divided into three separate parts.⁶²⁷ The figures typically wear short tunics and Phrygian style caps on their heads.⁶²⁸

Sometimes, a fourth person, who is not depicted as an *orante*, is also visible. This fourth figure is typically an elderly, bearded man in a Roman garment and is presumably the redeemer that comes to the aid of the other three youths.⁶²⁹ Later, in the fourth century, the scene became more faithful to the narrative by including

⁶²³ G. Heidl, 'A három ifjú a tüzes kemencében' [The Three Youths in the Fiery Furnace] (2005), 18-9. This quite rare divergence from the biblical text had already been remarked in general by A. Prandi (*Argumenti e spunti* (1961), 162.) probably because of the division of the scene into three distinct elements.

⁶²⁴ He [King Nebuchadnezzar] replied, "But I see four men unbound, walking in the middle of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the fourth has the appearance of a god". (Daniel 3:25)

⁶²⁵ J. Engemann, 'Zur Interpretation der Darstellungen der Drei Jünglinge in Babylon' (2002), 82; J. Dresken-Weiland, *Bild, Grab und Wort* (2010), 311.

⁶²⁶ J. Engemann, 'Orans' (2014).

⁶²⁷ D. Howells, *A Catalogue of the Late Antique Gold Glass in the British Museum* (2015), 96.

⁶²⁸ R. Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (2000), 79-80.

⁶²⁹ A thorough analysis of the side figures is available at C. Carletti, *I tre giovani ebrei di Babilonia nell'arte Cristiana antica* (1975), 32-47.

king Nebuchadnezzar and the dramatic refusal of submission by the three young men.⁶³⁰

Twenty-three occurrences of this image in the catacombs of Rome are listed.⁶³¹ In Roman catacombs, the image of the Three Youths is combined with no other picture in particular, but on the covers of sarcophagi, it often occurs together with one of the Jonah scenes.⁶³² The juxtaposition of Jonah and the Three Hebrew Youths has early Christian literal evidence, too. In his treatise on the resurrection of the flesh, Tertullian mentions them together with the Israelites in the desert and the bodily ascents of Enoch and Elijah as examples of those whose bodies remained intact despite fires or devouring sea monsters.⁶³³ He writes:

[...] *that the Babylonian fires injured neither the hats nor the trousers of the three brethren, though these are garments foreign to the Jews; that Jonah, though swallowed up by the beast of the sea in whose belly wrecked ships were daily digested, is spewed out unhurt three days later* (Tertullian, *De resurrectione carnis*, 58)⁶³⁴

There are fiery furnace scenes that are juxtaposed with the figure of Noah. There are two examples⁶³⁵ (one in the Priscilla Catacomb (Figure 86), another in the *Coemeterium Maius*), where the image of the Three Youths is put adjacent to Noah's image in such a way that the link between the two pictures is formed by a dove holding an olive branch.⁶³⁶

The combination of these two images has been regarded as an example of 'inter-visibility' in early Christian artefacts. The viewer was expected to fill in the gaps in the details of the narrative and to draw conclusions about the juxtaposition of certain images that served as references or signs of the stories rather than their illustrations.⁶³⁷ (The theme of composition and agenda was discussed in Chapter 2.2.)

⁶³⁰ *Ibid.*, 113-4; M. Rassart-Debergh, 'Les Trois Hébreux dans la fournaise' (1978), 450; R. Jensen, 'The Three Hebrew Youths and the Problem of the Emperor's Portrait in Early Christianity' (2016).

⁶³¹ A. Nestori, *Repertorio topografico delle pitture delle catacombe romane* (1975), 200.

⁶³² J. Dresken-Weiland, *Bild, Grab und Wort* (2010), 311.

⁶³³ R. Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (2000), 173.

⁶³⁴ E. Evans (ed., trans., comm.), *Tertullian's Treatise on the Resurrection* (1960), 173.

⁶³⁵ A. Nestori, *Repertorio topografico delle pitture delle catacombe romane* (1975), 200. 210.

⁶³⁶ G. F. Snyder, *Ante Pacem* (1985), 54; J. Dresken-Weiland, *Bild, Grab und Wort* (2010), 307.

⁶³⁷ R. Jensen, 'Early Christian Images and Exegesis' (2007), 71-2.

There is an interpretation that regards the image of the Three Youths as a representation of survival and peace in a hostile environment.⁶³⁸ The *orante* hand position was to show clearly the state of the people in great need facing extreme threat. The uplifted hands represent reunification with God in eternal life in the case of the Three Youths, Daniel, Noah or Susannah alike. Thereby, they all serve as simple and direct examples of the acquired deliverance in time of danger.⁶³⁹

In this approach, this scene would above all point to political harassment, and similarly to the other frequently depicted stories from the *Book of Daniel*, i.e. that of Daniel and Susannah, which jointly form a cycle, and can be interpreted according to the paradigm of deliverance from intimidations and persecutions.⁶⁴⁰ (The hypothesis which regards these Old Testament images in the framework of the '*Rettungsparadigmata*' was introduced in Chapter 3.3 and evaluated in 3.7.3.)

A second type of interpretation asserts that the meaning of this scene, similar to that of Noah, Jonah or Daniel, unfolds when taken to mean perseverance even as far as martyrdom.⁶⁴¹ Early Christian writers had already presumed this layer of this biblical story. The first evidence is as early as the late first or the first half of the second century from the writing known as the first epistle of Clement to the Corinthians. It says:

*Was it by those who practised the magnificent and glorious worship of the Most High that Ananias, Azarias, and Misael, were shut up in the fiery furnace? Let us not suppose that such was the case. Who, then, were the men who did these things? Abominable men and full of all wickedness were inflamed to such a degree of wrath that they cast into tortures those who, with a holy and a blameless purpose, served God, not knowing that the Most High is a champion and defender of those who with a pure conscience serve his most excellent name, to whom be glory world without end. Amen. (1 Clement 45:7)*⁶⁴²

⁶³⁸ A detailed demonstration of the research history concerning early Christian iconography of the Three Youths in the Furnace is available from J. Engemann, 'Zur Interpretation der Darstellungen der Drei Jünglinge in Babylon' (2002), 84-91.

⁶³⁹ F. Bisconti, *I tre giovani di Babilonia nella fornace* (1985), 264.

⁶⁴⁰ G. F. Snyder, *Ante Pacem* (1985), 54.

⁶⁴¹ E. Le Blant, *Les persécuteurs et les martyrs aux premiers siècles de notre ère* (1895), 115; J. Engemann, 'Zur Interpretation der Darstellungen der Drei Jünglinge in Babylon' (2002), 83. 89.

⁶⁴² C. H. Hoole (trans.), *The First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians* (1885).

In the first half of the third century, North African authors particularly, lay emphasis on the Three Youths' refusal to venerate pagan idols and remain faithful to God. By these means, both Tertullian and Cyprian used their story as an exhortation to courageous persistence during the times of persecution at several places.⁶⁴³ Later, in the fourth century, Jerome also highlights the braveness of the Hebrew Youths and mentions it as an example to the gentiles. He writes:

[...] an opportunity of salvation was afforded to the barbarian nations through the opportune presence of the captive Jews [among them], with the result that after they had first come to know the power of the one true God through Daniel's revelation of the dream, they might then learn from the brave example of the three youths to despise death [variant: might learn that death ought to be despised], and to eschew the worship of idols. (Jerome, Commentarii in Danielelem, 3.1)⁶⁴⁴

There is another interpretation that gives emphasis to the image's connection to Noah's picture. (Figure 25) This hypothesis supposes a parallelism between the destruction of sinful people by means of water or fire as part of the eschatological judgment day, and between Noah's and the Youths' rescue from death, at the same time. As visual parables of judgement, these subjects would have referred to a moralistic warning, namely that only the righteous shall be rescued out of destruction.⁶⁴⁵

According to a fourth interpretation, the images of the Three Youths in the Furnace and Noah in his ark serve as typologies of baptism and bodily resurrection. Both Noah and the Three Youths may have been figuratively baptized, since martyrdom was also considered a type of baptism, 'baptism of blood'. The tradition behind this concept goes back to the First Epistle of John that states:

This is the one who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three that testify: the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement. (1 John 5:6-8)

⁶⁴³ Tertullian, *De idolatria*, 15; *Scorpiace*, 8; *Adversus Marcionem*, 4.41. Cyprian, *Epistulae*, 6.3; 58.5; 57.8; 61.2; *De lapsis*, 19; *De catholicae ecclesiae unitate*, 12.

⁶⁴⁴ *Jerome's Commentary on Daniel*, G. L. Archer (trans.) (1958), 35.

⁶⁴⁵ R. Jensen points out that the images of Noah and the Three Youths often appear on opposite ends of a sarcophagus, in the same way as the grape and grain harvests do on other similar monuments. Therefore, she suggests that these two biblical images are related to the harvesting scenes with regard to both their similar positions on the sarcophagi, as well as their meaning referring to the final, great judgement. (*Understanding Early Christian Art* (2000), 82).

Moreover, when John the Baptist announces the coming of Jesus, he differentiates his own baptism with only water, and that of the one who will come, with the Holy Spirit and with fire (*Matthew* 4:11-12). Therefore, both the flood in Noah's case and the fire in the case of the Youths could serve as *typoi* of baptism and point further to salvation and eternal life gained through baptism.⁶⁴⁶

In conclusion, the interpretation of the Three Youths in the fiery furnace has been approached from various points of view. One has been understood as referring to delivery from hostile threat, even from martyrdom, one to salvation through baptism and finally, one to the final judgement.

8.3. The Iconography of the Magi

The adoration of the Magi or the Wise Men was portrayed in a standardized way in early Christian artefacts. The earliest existing portrayal of the Magi, dated to the middle of the third century, appears above an arch in the Catacomb of Priscilla, in Rome.⁶⁴⁷ (Figure 87) Their picture is among the first narrative images in Christian artefacts, and predates most other New Testament scenes including any other representation of Christ's nativity.⁶⁴⁸

Although initially the number of the Magi varied between two and six in early Christian iconography, later it became generally accepted as three.⁶⁴⁹ The gospel does not mention the exact number of the Magi, and there is no certain tradition in this matter. Their number of three was probably influenced by various factors: the number of their gifts according to the *Gospel of Matthew*, by the allegorical interpretation of these three gifts by Origen in the third century⁶⁵⁰, and another

⁶⁴⁶ R. Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (2000), 82-3.

⁶⁴⁷ It is dated to 230-250 by F. Bisconti ('La Madonna di Priscilla' (1996), 30). See also: H. Leclercq, 'Mages', in *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie*, vol. 10.1 (1920), 980-1070; A. Schapman, *Explanation of the wall painting in the catacomb of Priscilla* (1929); S. Carletti, *Guide to the Catacombs of Priscilla* (2007).

⁶⁴⁸ C. Conidi, 'Natività', in F. Bisconti (ed.), *Temi di iconografia paleocristiana* (2000), 225-8; R. Jensen, 'Witnessing the Divine' (2001), 26.

⁶⁴⁹ J. Deckers, 'Die Huldigung der Magier in der Kunst der Spätantike' (1982), 23.

⁶⁵⁰ They [the Magi] came [...] bringing gifts, which they offered to him [Jesus] as one whose nature partook, if I may so speak, both of God and of a mortal man—gold, viz., as to a king; myrrh, as to one who was mortal; and incense, as to a God (*Contra Celsum*, 1.60).

passage in Origen's writings, where he parallels the Magi with another group consisting of three people.⁶⁵¹

The pictures' content and occurrence are noteworthy. They were depicted as three men, identical in size and race, dressed in Persian garments. They advance in a line in one direction. This kind of composition is characterized as 'dynamic horizontal'.⁶⁵² They carry gifts, one of which in many cases is a crown of gold, the so-called *aurum coronarium*.⁶⁵³ The early images appear predominantly in funerary settings: on catacomb walls or sarcophagi. In Roman catacombs, the image of the Magi was typically placed on the vault of the *arcosolia*, similarly to the aforementioned position of the Three Youths in the Fiery Furnace.⁶⁵⁴

Following the Constantinian turn, which brought a peaceful era for Christians in the Roman Empire, the picture of the Magi continued in popularity and was further developed by the elaboration of its narrative function. This meant that the presence of the mother on a throne and the child Jesus on her lap became constant, the faces of the three men gained individual features, differentiating them in age or race in several cases and also the attending angel and camels became part of the composition.⁶⁵⁵

The image of the Magi has been primarily interpreted in the context of the relation between Christians and the official Roman authority. In the matrix of late Roman society, the iconography of the adoration of the Magi would have asserted Christ's strength and power using imperial categories and political terms.⁶⁵⁶ Offering the precious gifts, especially the above mentioned gold crown was to express a challenge to the all-powerful Roman Empire and her emperor by artistic means.

Another opinion remains in the interpretative field of might and politics, but inverts the elements making the emperor the initiator. In this interpretation, the Adoration image was not intended to challenge the supremacy of the emperor, but

⁶⁵¹ *Those three, who seek peace from the Word of God and desire to anticipate his fellowship with a covenant, can indeed represent the magi who come from parts of the East learned in the books of their fathers and in the instruction of their ancestors and say: "We certainly saw the One born King and we have seen that God is with him and we have come to worship him." (Homiliae in Genesim, 14.3; Origen's Homilies on Genesis and Exodus, R. Heine (trans.) (1985), 200).*

⁶⁵² G. Noga-Banai, *The trophies of the martyrs* (2008), 51.

⁶⁵³ G. F. Snyder, *Ante Pacem* (1985), 58.

⁶⁵⁴ J. Dresken-Weiland, *Bild, Grab und Wort* (2010), 269.

⁶⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁶⁵⁶ G. F. Snyder, *Ante Pacem* (1985), 58.

would have been promoted by Emperor Constantine the Great himself to demonstrate the close connection between imperial victory and the Christians' belief. The image of the Magi may have been used with similar intentions that have been proposed for the Christogram, which was used as an official imperial triumph symbol in the first half of the fourth century.⁶⁵⁷ (On the Christogram as a *tropaion*, see Chapter 7.2)

Decker's interpretation goes further when identifying the distinct iconographic elements of the Adoration image as transformed versions of the contemporaneous Roman imperial iconography. The image is described as follows: foreign men in recognizable Oriental garments (trousers and caps) hasten to pay homage to their sovereign and held their precious gifts in their hands. Gold is brought to the triumphant emperor who rules over the whole earth. In the new Christian context, the subjugated Orientals comply with the Magi, the golden crown with their gifts in their hands and the all-powerful emperor with the new-born Christ.⁶⁵⁸

Another hypothesis explains the popularity of the Adoration scene from the fourth century on by interpreting it as a claim that Christ was the supreme magician. This idea uses the same passage from Origen's *Against Celsus*, which has been partly cited above and will be again in ensuing sections. It presumes that the Magi's efficacy in divinations, which rested on their familiarity with evil spirits, was broken by Christ's greater power due to his divinity immediately after his birth.⁶⁵⁹ This interpretation argues that by the fourth century, when Late Antique mystery religions gained popularity indeed, the distinctive Oriental dress worn also by the Magi designated not just foreigners in general, but Oriental magicians specifically. It occurred in the iconography of Orpheus of Thrace, Mithras and the Zoroastrian magicians from Persia, too.⁶⁶⁰

The scene of the Magi has also been interpreted as referring to hopes for the afterlife. In this context, an epitaph from the Catacomb of Priscilla can be cited, on

⁶⁵⁷ J. Deckers, 'Die Huldigung der Magier in der Kunst der Spätantike' (1982), 28.

⁶⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁶⁵⁹ T. Mathews, *The Clash of Gods* (1993), 84-5.

⁶⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

which there is an inscription: SEVERA | INDEOVI | VAS.⁶⁶¹ (Figure 88) A female bust is carved to the left of the inscription. Probably, it is Severa herself. The inscription is placed to the left of the Magi and Mary with the child on her lap, who resembles the traditional iconography of Isis and Horus. There is a star above her head and a male figure behind her chair, who points to the star. This figure is probably the prophet Balaam.⁶⁶²

The connection between the narrative of Balaam and the Magi is represented by the star, which is present between the two parts of the composition. This correlation can be found in Origen's work titled *Against Celsus*. He writes:

I am therefore of opinion that, possessing as they [the Magi] did the prophecies of Balaam, which Moses also records, inasmuch as Balaam was celebrated for such predictions, and finding among them the prophecy about the star, and the words, „I shall show him to him, but not now; I deem him happy, although he will not be near,” they conjectured that the man whose appearance had been foretold along with that of the star, had actually come into the world; and having predetermined that he was superior in power to all demons, and to all common appearances and powers, they resolved to offer him homage. (Origen, Contra Celsum, 1.60)⁶⁶³

The inscription of the slab explicitly refers to life after death provided by God. It is highly probable that the biblical scene was carved beside it to affirm this message of hope by iconographic means. Both the figure of Balaam and the Magi are directed to the Christ child in the middle of the picture. His kingship is visible not only by the fact that he sits on a throne (together with her mother), but is manifest via the fulfilment of the ancient prophecies (signed by Balaam) and the adoration of the non-Jewish Magi. Such a divine sovereign must have the power to endow Severa with the life that was wished for after her death.

⁶⁶¹ J. Dresken-Weiland, A. Weiland, 'Bemerkungen zu szenischen Ritzdarstellungen' (2005), 41; D. Calcagnini, *Minima Biblica* (2006), 88, No 61.

⁶⁶² Balaam predicted that a rising star coming out of Jacob would herald a great ruler of Israel (*Numbers* 24:17).

⁶⁶³ *Against Celsus*, F. Crombie (trans.) (1885).

8.4. The Connection Between the Three Youths and the Magi in Early Christian Iconography

The resemblance between the image of the Three Youths in the Fiery Furnace and the Adoration of the Magi in early Christian iconography is obvious. It is manifest not only via the iconographic similarities (three identical male figures in Oriental garments), but can also be acknowledged through the fact that they were often and willingly combined either in wall paintings, on sarcophagi⁶⁶⁴ or on silver caskets.⁶⁶⁵ This combination of the two scenes is a peculiarity of early Christian iconography, since it seems that no contemporaneous literary evidence provides explanation for and theological background of this phenomenon.⁶⁶⁶

However, G. Noga-Banai gives a reference to a passage in Jerome's *Commentarii in Danielelem*, which really mentions the Magi from the *Gospel of Matthew* as being similar to other Chaldean mathematicians and philosophers, who had been asked to interpret the dream of King Nebuchadnezzar.⁶⁶⁷ Jerome writes:

[...] *common usage and ordinary conversation understands the term magi as wicked enchanters. Yet they were regarded differently among their own nation, inasmuch as they were the philosophers of the Chaldeans, and even the kings and princes of this same nation do all they can to acquire a knowledge of this science. Wherefore also it was they who first at the nativity of our Lord and Savior learned of his birth, and who came to holy Bethlehem and adored the child, under the guidance of the star which shone above them.* (Jerome, *Commentarii in Danielelem*, 2.2)⁶⁶⁸

Even if this passage is regarded as literary evidence for some kind of connection between the Three Hebrew Youths and the Magi, which is less obvious, it does not result in a comprehensive explanation for their appearances in early Christian iconography.

The typical position for both the Three Youths' and the Magi's pictures in Roman catacombs was on the vaulting of the *arcosolia*. The longitudinal surface of

⁶⁶⁴ J. Huskinson, 'Face to Face with Authority' (1989), passim.

⁶⁶⁵ G. Noga-Banai, *The trophies of the martyrs* (2008), 54.

⁶⁶⁶ J. Engemann, 'Eine spätantike Messingkanne mit zwei Darstellungen aus der Magiererzählung' (1984), 121; J. Dresken-Weiland, *Bild, Grab und Wort* (2010), 274.

⁶⁶⁷ G. Noga-Banai, *The trophies of the martyrs* (2008), 54.

⁶⁶⁸ *Jerome's Commentary on Daniel*, G. L. Archer (trans.) (1958), 25.

the arch of an *arcosolium* proved to be an appropriate place for such compositions in which the figures were arranged in lengthwise.⁶⁶⁹ In the SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber, the two side walls of the vault had a similar, longitudinal character. Therefore, this wall surface offered itself to be decorated with an iconographic structure organized in the same way as the vaults of the *arcosolia* in the catacombs in Rome.

It has also been pointed out that there are juxtapositions of images in early Christian artefacts where the external similarity might have been more relevant in the juxtaposition of certain images than the adequacy of content. E.g., the three figures both in the image of Adam and Eve and the Three Youths in the Furnace seem to be a closer link between them than any other theological resemblance.⁶⁷⁰

This supposition of a rather compositional than ideological connection to the image of Adam and Eve seems to be less adequate on the Adoration of the Magi. R. Jensen hypothesizes a 'typological system of birth, conception, fall and incarnation' visually appearing on two sarcophagi from the fourth century: one of them is in the Vatican Museums (Vatican 104) (Figure 89), the other one in Arles, France.⁶⁷¹ Both are called 'dogmatic' sarcophagus. These similarly decorated and composed sarcophagi depict among others the creation of Adam and Eve as well as the Magi.⁶⁷²

On the left hand side of the upper register on the front side of the sarcophagus today in the Vatican Museums, there is an image of the Trinity creating Adam and Eve, whereas directly below it, in the lower register, the three Magi are carved presenting gifts to the Christ child, who is seated on his mother's lap. Regarding the physical proximity and the compositional parallelism between the two images, a relationship between the two scenes can be assumed beyond doubt.

This connection is highlighted by a small, but two-fold meaning element of the iconography. The first of the Magi points upward with his raised index finger not only to the star which led them to Jesus, but due to the structure of the whole side of the sarcophagus, as it has been outlined briefly, also to the image of Adam and Eve in the upper register above his head. (Figure 90) In R. Jensen's interpretation,

⁶⁶⁹ J. Dresken-Weiland, *Bild, Grab und Wort* (2010), 269.

⁶⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 308.

⁶⁷¹ C. Sintès (ed.), *Musée de l'Arles antique* (1996), 157.

⁶⁷² R. Jensen, 'The Fall and Rise of Adam and Eve in Early Christian Art and Literature' (2003), 46.

this composition suggests that creation became completed in incarnation; the ‘fall’ of Adam and Eve and the Adoration of the Magi are equally part of the redemption narrative. Therefore, it is appropriate to juxtapose the beginning and the moment of its fulfilment.⁶⁷³

The juxtaposition of the Three Youths and the Magi was also probably caused by more than mere aesthetic reasons. R. Jensen understands that the link between the Three Youths and the Magi (and also with Daniel in the lions’ den in several cases) is that on the one hand, all of them were easterners (i.e. Daniel and the Hebrew Youths lived in the Persian court) and on the other, that they possessed the gift of prophecy, interpretation of dreams and perhaps even of magic to resist the evil of pagan idolatry.⁶⁷⁴ To support this argument, she recalls the fourth-century catacomb of Marcus and Marcellianus in Rome, where the paintings of the Magi and the Three Youths are grouped together.⁶⁷⁵ (Figure 91) Following this, Jensen concludes that both can serve equally as a symbol of either salvation of the righteous, or baptism and resurrection.⁶⁷⁶

F. Massara also confirms the strong connection between the two scenes when stating that the episode of the Three Youths in the Fiery Furnace is a *pendant* of the one of the Magi. Relying on the *Dictionnaire d’archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie*⁶⁷⁷, she says that the placement of the two episodes is usually motivated not only by a call for symmetry, but also a historical-symbolical reading of the two stories both with three people who renounce idolatry and embrace faith.⁶⁷⁸

Such an arrangement of the two scenes can be found on a white marble sarcophagus from Arles, France, which was discovered in 1974 and is today in the Musée de l’Arles antique.⁶⁷⁹ (Figure 92) On the sarcophagus’ lid, the scenes are carved on either side of a centrally placed group of two Victory figures. They carry a medallion-shaped *tabula* containing an inscription with the name of Marcia Romana

⁶⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷⁴ R. Jensen, ‘Witnessing the Divine’, (2001), 24-32.

⁶⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁶⁷⁶ R. Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (2000), 82-5.

⁶⁷⁷ *Dictionnaire d’archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie*, vol. 10/2 (1931), 979-1070.

⁶⁷⁸ F. P. Massara, ‘Magi’, in Fabrizio Bisconti (ed.), *Temi di iconografia paleocristiana* (2000), 207-8.

⁶⁷⁹ J.-M. Rouquette, ‘Sarcophage de Marcia Romana Celsa’, in C. Sintès (ed.), *Musée de l’Arles antique* (1996), 156.

Celsa.⁶⁸⁰ The images of the Youths and the Magi seem to be intentionally composed in such a way that while they complement one another, a real dialogue is created in this composition.

The *pendant* type connection of the two images is also exemplified on early Christian silver caskets. As G. Noga-Banai evinced, 'in two out of the three representations of the Fiery Furnace scene on the silver caskets, the Adoration of the Magi is depicted opposite or next to them'.⁶⁸¹ She asserts that correlation between the two images is quasi a 'visual echo', in order to produce a balanced and harmonious iconographic program on the artefact carrying the message of the promised salvation.

8.5. A Hypothesis Proposed

Taking into consideration all the observations and data discussed above, it can be argued for that early Christian iconographic programs were aimed to meet artistic as well as ideological criteria at the same time. Therefore, in the SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber, the lengthwise arrangement of the panels on the two side walls was motivated not only by mere practical or aesthetical intentions. It does not seem accidental that this area of the decoration is placed above the head of the deceased in the *arcosolia* as well as on the vaulted side walls of this burial chamber. It can be assumed that the biblical scenes and more so their particular combination was intended to bear a special message to the people buried there, under that vaulting, in an iconographic way.

This layer of meaning is not independent of the message to the surviving mourners, but it could fill its consolatory role even via the fact that this area was addressed primarily to the deceased. For example, the deliverance of the Three Youths from the fire could mediate both the assuring promise of the deceased's liberation from death and the hope for a similar deliverance for the living in the

⁶⁸⁰ *Repertorium der christlich-antiken Sarkophage*, vol. 3 (2003), No 37.

⁶⁸¹ G. Noga-Banai, *The trophies of the martyrs* (2008), 54.

future at the same time.⁶⁸² (For the question of the target audience of early Christian artefacts, see Chapter 2.4.)

In my view, the orientation of the three figures could be explained as follows.⁶⁸³ The iconographic importance of this orientation is confirmed by the picture on the opposite edge. Noah who is shown in his usual box-like ark turns to the centre panel as well. It can be assumed that the three pictures were composed together. This presupposition is supported by the various examples of combinations mentioned above. There are parallels between the Three Youths and Noah images both in appearance as well as in content.

Besides all of these explanations, it may well be possible that the first viewers of the wall paintings of the SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber in the early nineteenth century were not completely wrong when they identified the three men as the Magi from the *Gospel of Matthew*.⁶⁸⁴ This identification was enhanced by the connection of the two panels of the three oriental men and the woman and her baby on her lap. The middle image was identified as the Virgin Mary with the child Jesus to whom the Magi hasten bringing their precious gifts.

However, the identification of 'a woman with her child' composition as the Madonna and the Child Jesus appearing on the earliest Christian artefacts does not stand without opposition. For example, the so-called earliest depiction of the Virgin Mary in the Catacomb of Priscilla⁶⁸⁵ (dated to the third century) 'may be nothing more than a poignant funerary portrait of a dead mother and child'.⁶⁸⁶ Expanding this hypothesis, other images of this type might be also interpreted in similar terms. Though the sole representation of the Virgin Mary was in fact sporadic in the third

⁶⁸² Cf. J. Engemann, 'Zur Interpretation der Darstellungen der Drei Jünglinge in Babylon' (2002), 83.

⁶⁸³ P. Csigi, 'Deliberate Ambiguities in Early Christian Wall Paintings in Sopianae' (2014).

⁶⁸⁴ The list of the scholars sharing this identification is given in a footnote at the beginning of the present chapter.

⁶⁸⁵ S. Carletti, *Guide to the Catacombs of Priscilla* (2007), 23.; F. Bisconti, 'La Madonna di Priscilla: Interventi di restauro ed ipotesi sulla dinamica decorativa' (1996); F. Bisconti, 'La Madonna di Priscilla: interventi di restauro ed ipotesi sulla dinamica decorativa', in *idem*, *Le pitture delle catacombe Romane* (2011), 71-84.; U. Utro, 'Maria', in *Temi di iconografia paleocristiana*, (2000), 212-5.

⁶⁸⁶ G. Parlbay, 'The Origin of Marian Art in the Catacombs and the Problems of Identification' (2008), 48.

and fourth centuries, she does appear as a figure in the stories of Christ's life, for instance, first and foremost in the Adoration of the Magi scene.⁶⁸⁷

Therefore, such a theory is demanded that can explain all key iconographic details of the fragmented picture, which are essential in the identification of this painting. These elements are: the importance of the number three (the three figures), the orientation toward the next panel, the Oriental clothes, the flame-like patches under their feet and the bent arms, probably holding a bowl. (Figure 23) Hence, taking into consideration all these features, I suggest that the identity of these three figures is intentionally kept ambiguous.

T. Matthews in his book *The Clash of Gods* noticed a similar transposition of the Three Youths in the Furnace into the iconography of the three Magi. He writes:

The most startling detail of the scene is the identification of the three young men with the Magi. For the brave magicians, who turn with gestures of disgust from the image of the emperor, find before them the star of the Magi. Following the star, in the sequel image panel, they find the Christ Child on his Mother's lap and they worship him.⁶⁸⁸

Matthews points to the example of a fourth-century sarcophagus relief from Saint Gilles du Gard (near Arles) in France.⁶⁸⁹ (Figure 93) In this picture, the Three Youths from the *Book of Daniel* and the Magi are conflated: three men in eastern garments turn away from an idol and towards a star. It was supposed that the artists confused the figures of the three young men with the Magi because of the similarity of their dress.⁶⁹⁰ But in Matthews' opinion, 'this "mistake" was deliberate – the artists wanted to identify the two famous sets of the three magicians.'⁶⁹¹

A similarly ambiguous depiction of the Magi can be found on another sarcophagus from Italy. This fourth-century sarcophagus is named after the person

⁶⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 48. 51-2.; E. Rubery, 'Pope John VII's Devotion to Mary: Papal Images of Mary from the Fifth to the Early Eight Century' (2008), 155.

⁶⁸⁸ T. Mathews, *The Clash of Gods* (1993), 79.

⁶⁸⁹ *Repertorium der christlich-antiken Sarkophage*, vol. 3 (2003), No 492. Cf., E. Le Blant, *Le sarcophages chrétiens de la Gaule* (1886) and *id.*, *Étude sur le sarcophages chrétiens de la ville d'Arles* (1878).

⁶⁹⁰ H. Leclercq, 'Hébreux, Les trios jeunes', in *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie*, F. Cabrol, H. Leclercq (eds) (1925), 2107-26. The close similarity between the garments of the two groups of eastern men has also been highlighted by M. Rassart-Debergh ('Les Trois Hébreux dans la fournaise' (1978), 454).

⁶⁹¹ T. Mathews, *The Clash of Gods* (1993), 80.

whose name is carved into the *tabula* of the sarcophagus: Flavius Julius Catervus.⁶⁹² It is found in the cathedral of Tolentino. Both sides of the sarcophagus are decorated with the images of the Magi. One of them shows three beardless men clothed in Oriental garments, wearing the so-called Phrygian caps as they hasten with their gifts to the seated Mary with her son on her lap. (Figure 94)

The other one shows them in the court of King Herod. (Figure 95) In this case, they are depicted in an unusual position: two of them are turned to the left, to the centre of the image, the middle one is pointing upwards to the star, but the third of the Magi, who is the closest one to the bearded Herod and his two guards, has his back to them and turns towards his two companions. Above the usual similarities between the two scenes, the gesture of facing away is reminiscent of the Three Youths' typical image, in which they refuse to revere a false idol, turn away from the sovereign and his sculpture prepared to undertake the inevitable consequences of their action. In the Catervus sarcophagus image, the allusion to this scene is further enhanced by the fact that King Herod's bust is visible above the king's head standing on a sulcated pillar.⁶⁹³

G. Noga-Banai, who studied Late Antique silver reliquary caskets and their iconography, opposes Mathews' proposal on a 'deliberate mistake'. She refuses Mathews' hypothesis mentioned above when stating that Mathews' 'interpretation does not necessarily hold for other representations of the two trio scenes'.⁶⁹⁴ However, she does not deny the close relation between the two images; on the contrary, her argument builds on the hypothesis of an even deeper conviction. In her view, the association of the Magi as a reference to Christ's Epiphany with the Three Youths transmits the message of the promised salvation.⁶⁹⁵

My hypothesis is that the artist in Sopianae deliberately produced such a composition with three men in Oriental clothing that could be interpreted as the Magi turning to the next panel with the Mother and the Child, and at the same time, as the Three Youths in the Fiery Furnace connected to Noah on the opposite

⁶⁹² M. Ioli, *Il sarcofago paleocristiano di Catervio nel Duomo di Tolentino* (1971); A. Nestori, *Il mausoleo e il sarcofago di Flavio Iulius Catervius a Tolentino* (1996).

⁶⁹³ F. P. Massara, 'Magi', in Fabrizio Bisconti (ed.), *Temi di iconografia paleocristiana* (2000), 208.

⁶⁹⁴ G. Noga-Banai, *The trophies of the martyrs* (2008), 54-5.

⁶⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

side of the wall. Furthermore, this technique, i.e. the combination of several scenes into a single composition, cannot have been unfamiliar to the artist of this burial chamber in Sopiana. The depiction of Jonah on the opposite side wall is an excellent example for condensing into one single panel what is usually depicted in a number of individual pictures.⁶⁹⁶ (Figure 27) If the present hypothesis is correct, this combination is not just another occurrence of the known and accepted juxtaposition of scenes of the Three Youths and the Magi, but also a unique and masterful utilization of the potentiality of the two themes in one composition.

⁶⁹⁶ The condensing composition of the Jonah panel is analysed by F. Gerke ('Die Wandmalereien der Petrus-Paulus Katakomben in Pécs (Sopiana)' (1954), 157. 175), by G. Heidl ('A pécsi I. számú sírkamra Jónás-képe és Szent Jeromos Jónás kommentárja' [The Jonah Picture in Burial Chamber No I in Pécs and St Jerome's Commentary on Jonah] (2005), 201-8) and by K. Hudák (*A Fine and Private Place* (2009), 45-8).

9. The Missing Picture

The picture areas of the eastern sidewalls in the SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber are quite damaged. Of the picture panel portraying the scene of the Fall, only Eve's torso and some details of the tree survived. (Figure 26) Adam's figure has completely vanished. The exact identification of the middle panel is not possible due to damage to the secco. Finally, the south-eastern corner panel tells the tale of Jonah condensed into one single picture area as mentioned before. (Figure 27)

The picture in the middle panel has perished. But there is a report about a fragment from the beginning of the twentieth century. According to O. Szőnyi, 'there was a 10-cm-long fragment of a strong foot there, which was drawn with black contours and inclined at the knee. The upper part of the foot is 3.7, the lower 5.6 cm long'.⁶⁹⁷ Proceeding from this fragment, he looked for a composition common among the catacomb paintings in Rome, which has a figure in the nude or wearing only a tunic in the centre. He finally found it in the depiction of Daniel. (Figure 10)

Later Szőnyi suggested that it is possible that this fragment belonged to the hip of the Good Shepherd. This suggestion was shared by L. Nagy in the 1930s.⁶⁹⁸ According to F. Gerke, possible depictions present in a panel between the Fall and the cycle of Jonah might have been: the Good Shepherd, *Orante*, the resurrection of Lazarus, or another salvation scene from the Old Testament.⁶⁹⁹

In the first decade of the 2000s, G. Heidl further developed this theory. In his new hypothesis, a new approach to the question is put forward. He suggested that the figure of the Good Shepherd should have been there because in this case, there would have been a depiction of Christ in every central field of the burial chamber. (His hypothesis was discussed earlier in Chapter 7.6.) If a viewer stood in the middle of the room, there would be a Christogram opposite him in the middle of the wall

⁶⁹⁷ O. Szőnyi, *A pécsi ókeresztény sírkamra* [The early Christian burial chamber in Pécs] (1907), 53.

⁶⁹⁸ L. Nagy, 'Pannonia Sacra' (1983), 29-148.

⁶⁹⁹ F. Gerke, 'Die Wandmalereien der Petrus-Paulus Katakomben in Pécs (Sopianae)' (1954), 156.

between Peter and Paul, another Christogram above his head on the ceiling, the child with his mother on his left hand side and another picture of Christ on the other side. Knowing that the Good Shepherd is one of the most traditional compositions of the Roman catacombs, what else could it be than the popular Good Shepherd? – claims Heidl.⁷⁰⁰

Before trying to choose between Daniel⁷⁰¹ and the Good Shepherd,⁷⁰² the question will be approached in a broader context. According to J. Spier, the Christian artefacts of the third and fourth centuries were marked by ‘a use of a limited selection of concisely composed images, which were often juxtaposed in various ways’.⁷⁰³ He suggests that the limited selection of pictures must have had a special meaning, but the images are almost never accompanied by explanatory inscriptions. However, based on the extant evidence, we can assert that ‘certain biblical scenes appear with great frequency, others only occasionally, and some not at all.’⁷⁰⁴

‘The consistency of the iconographic programs from tomb to tomb indicates that individual taste or personal whim played little role in the decoration of these places’, claims R. Jensen.⁷⁰⁵ Therefore, to make a well-substantiated hypothesis about the missing panel, a composition of this kind should be found. Since G. Snyder states in his book, *Ante Pacem* that ‘early Christian archaeology refers primarily to Rome’,⁷⁰⁶ A. Nestori’s collection⁷⁰⁷ of the wall paintings in the different catacombs of Rome can provide a stable and reliable initiation for further considerations.

But before a more detailed analysis, a unique iconographic feature of the Sopianae cemetery needs to be mentioned. The fourth century brought forward several innovations in Christian iconography. From the first decades of this century, the list of popular biblical scenes grew significantly both in funerary context and in church decoration as well. A lot of other episodes from the Old Testament were

⁷⁰⁰ G. Heidl, ‘Remarks on the Iconography in the ‘Peter-Paul’ (No. 1) Burial Chamber of Sopianae’ (2014).

⁷⁰¹ J. Daniélou, ‘Daniel’ (1957).

⁷⁰² J. Engemann, ‘Hirt’ (1991).

⁷⁰³ J. Spier, ‘The earliest Christian art’ (2007), 8.

⁷⁰⁴ R. Jensen, ‘Early Christian Images and Exegesis’ (2007), 71.

⁷⁰⁵ R. Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (2000), 27.

⁷⁰⁶ G. Snyder, *Ante Pacem* (1985), 3.

⁷⁰⁷ A. Nestori, *Repertorio topografico delle pitture delle catacombe romane* (1975).

added to the former repertoire. Previously unknown passages from the *Book of Genesis* were depicted on the paintings in the Via Latina Catacomb (e.g. Abraham's visitors at Mamre and scenes from the life of Joseph) and from other books (Pharaoh's daughter finding Moses and the manifestation of the burning bush).⁷⁰⁸

But these changes do not affect the paintings in the cemetery of Sopianae. It is conspicuous how conservative the catalogue of the pictures is here. Snyder draws the attention to the fact that

[...] early Christian art in other locations where the time lapse between them and Rome gives us a post-Constantinian date, but a pre-Constantinian style. [...] The frescoes there repeat what has been found in Rome as third-century materials.⁷⁰⁹

The only exception in Sopianae could be the depiction of the Magi discussed in the former section (see Chapters 8.1 and 8.5). But if that hypothesis is appropriate, it is not the introduction of an absolutely fresh topic, but rather the expanded interpretation of an older form.

Taking into consideration this provincial phenomenon, examples are collected in Rome which are similar to the wall paintings of the Sopianae burial chamber.⁷¹⁰ The earlier argument that since the eastern wall is decorated only with Old Testament scenes, on the other side 'a similarly Old Testament scene (for example Daniel) is a more likely guess',⁷¹¹ is not satisfactory.

The details of this compilation can be found in the following chart. As it can be seen, there is no place in Rome where all of the pictures from Sopianae would appear in the same *cubiculum*. At the same time, there are such places where four of them occur together. (The numbers of these *cubicula* are written in italics.) Having examined these places, it can be claimed that there are four *cubicula*, where the Good Shepherd appears, but there are only two examples among them without the

⁷⁰⁸ R. Jensen, 'Early Christian Images and Exegesis' (2007), 72; cf. A. Ferrua, *Le pitture della nuova catacomba di Via Latina* (1960); L. Kötzsche-Breitenbruch, *Die neue Katakomben an der Via Latina in Rom* (1976); W. Tronzo, *The Via Latina catacomb* (1986); F. Bisconti, *Il restauro dell'ipogeo di Via Dino Compagni* (2003).

⁷⁰⁹ G. Snyder, *Ante Pacem* (1985), 33.

⁷¹⁰ A. Nestori, *Repertorio topografico delle pitture delle catacombe romane* (1975), 191. 192. 195. 198. 200. 203-4. 210.

⁷¹¹ K. Hudák, 'The Iconographical program of the wallpaintings' (2009), 53.

presence of Daniel. There are four instances when the picture of Daniel is there without the Good Shepherd.

<i>Adam & Eve</i>	<i>Noah</i>	<i>Three Youths</i>	<i>Jonah</i>	<i>Woman with Child</i>	<i>Daniel</i>	<i>Good Shepherd</i>
Aureli 1						Aureli 2
		Balbina 2			Balbina 2	
Callisto 37		Callisto 27	Callisto 2, 6, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 27		Callisto 2, 6, 28	Callisto 2, 3, 4, 6, 14, 21, 22, 23, 26, 45, 46
			Circo di Massenzio 1			
			Ciriaca 2			
				Commodilla 3	Commodilla 5	
<i>Domitilla</i> 33, 39 (?), 43, 51, 57, 69, 77	<i>Domitilla</i> 3 e 10, 31, 43, 45, 62, 69	<i>Domitilla</i> 31, 33, 62, 69	<i>Domitilla</i> 27, 30, 31, 36, 60, 62, 74	<i>Domitilla</i> 54	<i>Domitilla</i> 3 e 10, 28, 31, 39 (?), 45, 62, 67, 69	<i>Domitilla</i> 23, 27, 34, 39, 42, 51, 63, 67, 70, 72, 73, 74, 75
		Ermete 4, 10	Ermete 3	Ermete 1	Ermete 3, 4, 9	Ermete 2, 3
<i>Giordani</i> 4, 7	<i>Giordani</i> 6, 7	<i>Giordani</i> 5	<i>Giordani</i> 6, 7, 11		<i>Giordani</i> 4, 6, 7, 12	<i>Giordani</i> 3
<i>Giordani</i> e <i>Epi-maco</i> 1					<i>Giordano</i> e <i>Epi-maco</i> 1	
<i>Maius</i> 8, 9, 17, 19	<i>Maius</i> 8, 9, 12, 13, 16	<i>Maius</i> 5, 12, 16, 19	<i>Maius</i> 4, 5, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17,	<i>Maius</i> 22	<i>Maius</i> 4, 8, 16, 18, 19	<i>Maius</i> 4, 5, 6 (?), 7, 8, 9, 12, 15,

			19			16, 17, 19
	Marco e Marcell. 6	Marco e Marcell. 5	Marco e Marcell. 5			Marco e Marcell. 5
	Minus 1				Minus 1	
	Nuziatella 4					
	Panfilio 1			Panfilio 5		
Pietro e Marcel- lino 44, 51, 52, 57, 58	Pietro e Marcel- lino 15, 21, 22, 27, 28, 47, 48, 57, 64, 65, 67, 69, 71, 77, 78	Pietro e Marcel- lino 71	Pietro e Marcel- lino 15, 16, 18, 22, 27, 28, 29, 34, 35, 39, 45, 47, 49, 51, 53, 58, 64, 67, 69, 77		Pietro e Marcel- lino 11, 21, 24, 27, 29, 41, 42 (?), 51, 54, 57, 65, 71, 74, 77, 78, 79	Pietro e Marcel- lino 14, 15, 16, 19, 20, 21, 22, 28, 29, 34, 35, 39, 42, 45, 51, 53, 57, 62(?), 64, 67, 71, 74, 76, 77, 78
	Ponziano 3	Ponziano 4				Ponziano 9
	Pretestato 19		Pretestato 8, 17		Pretestato 14, 17	Pretestato 3, 8, 15, 17, 19
Priscilla 32	Priscilla 1, 5, 39	Priscilla 7, 25, 39	Prisc. 5, 7, 9, 15, 32	Priscilla 10	Priscilla 39	Prisc. 5, 7, 9, 10, 13, 14, 15, 19, 22, 37
	Quatro oranti presso Vibia 2		Quatro oranti presso Vibia 2			
	Sebastiano 3		Sebastiano 3			Sebastiano 7 (?)

					Sta Croce 4	
			Tecla 2		Tecla 2	
				Valentino 1		
						Via Yser 5
	Via Anapo 12, 14	Via Anapo 8	Via Anapo 8, 9, 10, 11		Via Anapo 8, 9, 10, 11, 14	Via Anapo 7
<i>Via Latina 1, 2, 3, 11</i>	<i>Via Latina 1, 2, 13</i>	<i>Via Latina 1, 13</i>			<i>Via Latina 1, 13</i>	
	<i>Via Paisiello 1</i>	<i>Via Paisiello 1</i>	<i>Via Paisiello 1</i>			<i>Via Paisiello 1</i>

There are different theories in the current literature that attempt to explain why those certain Old Testament episodes occur among the catacomb paintings with a significant frequency. (The summary of the different explanations is available in Chapter 3.) Although the theories mentioned there differ in many aspects, the former presence of Daniel could be argued with fewer problems on the basis of any of them.

Another argument would be that the closest parallel of Adam and Eve was found in the so called Early Christian Mausoleum in Sopianae, in the same cemetery. Therefore, the fact should be taken into account that it is Daniel in the next picture to the one with Adam and Eve in that burial chamber, and there is no depiction of the Good Shepherd there, at least in the condition as we know the chamber today (since its ceiling has been damaged totally). (Figure 43)

On the basis of these two arguments, the assignment of Daniel's depiction to the missing panel has a higher likelihood.

R. Jensen presents a complex interpretation of early Christian images which occur above all in funerary art and their academic reception. She researches the significance of several biblical stories on different levels and tries to make cross-references among them. There are some concepts which appear as nodal points in this interpretation matrix. The key terms of interpretation used by Jensen are creation and recreation, resurrection, rebirth, baptism, salvation, hope. She supposes that as 'baptism is an extraordinarily complex rite with expansive theological signification' as 'artistic references to this sacrament ought to be as layered or multifaceted as baptism itself'.⁷¹² So on the grounds of her thoughts, it can be drawn as a conclusion that not only each biblical image as an individual element has a multivalent interpretation, but the whole iconographic structure of this burial chamber bears a multilevel significance.

⁷¹² R. Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (2000), 88.

10. The ‘Korsós’ or the Burial Chamber with the Jar

This Chapter is about the ‘Korsós’ or the Burial Chamber with the Jar, which contains decorative elements rather than single wall paintings.⁷¹³ Before analysing the iconographic program of the burial chamber, some preliminary remarks will be made on these elements which are usually regarded as ‘neutral’.

10.1. The So-Called ‘Neutral’ Elements

In this section, a special group of decorative elements of early Christian artefacts will be studied. They are usually described as ‘neutral’ elements. This description primarily refers to the fact that they seem to be neither Christian, nor ‘pagan’. They cannot be classified to either of these two categories, consequently, they are neutral. Although the application of the attribute ‘neutral’ is conventional in iconographic studies, there are reasons for examining the meaning and relevance of this ‘neutrality’.

10.1.1. *The concept of neutrality in early Christian iconography*

Neutrality is a debated concept not only in iconographic contexts. M. M. Bakhtin, a Russian philosopher and literary critic, while investigating the origins of the novel, was faced with the problem of neutral words. He asserted that

[...] there are no “neutral” words and forms — words and forms that can belong to “no one”. [...] All words have a “taste” of a profession, a genre, a tendency, a party, a particular work, a particular person, a generation, an

⁷¹³ F. Fülep, A. Fetter. ‘Neuere Forschungen in der ausgemalten, frühchristlichen Grabkammer Nr. II. von Pécs’ (1971); K. Hudák, L. Nagy, *A Fine and Private Place* (2009), 30-6.

age group, the day and hour. Each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life.⁷¹⁴

If visual art is recognized to create a special language for its makers and recipients, then it can be argued that its elements work like words in oral or written language. Adapting Bakhtin's argument to the field of iconography, it can be asserted that the use of the attribute 'neutral' in early Christian iconography can be problematic and mistaken, since it can be used in the sense of 'meaningless' or 'useless', or express the old binary model of either 'Christian' or 'pagan'. This model seems to be too reductive and exclusive. An iconographic interpretation based on the 'neutrality' of elements inadvertently limits itself to a constricted area or a binary world-view.

This category contains images and elements, like doves, peacocks, twining vines and grapes, fish and other sea creatures, boats, lambs, olive and palm trees, vases, tables, baskets of bread.⁷¹⁵ They are less figurative and more decorative, in several cases, symbolic. Their origins and parallels are generally apparent in non-Christian art. This fact suggests that the attribute 'neutral' is not entirely accurate in this aspect either. It does not exactly mean that a 'neutral' element was neither Christian, nor 'pagan', but much rather both, i.e. its employment was widespread in Late Antique art, not restricted to any religious group.

However, F. Bisconti observes a 'slow and progressive' transformation in early Christian artefacts that 'passes from neutral or poly-semantic themes to a true Christian repertoire.'⁷¹⁶ Because of this transforming nature and of the complex correlations between Christians and non-Christians in Late Antique art, the significance of these elements cannot be reduced merely to Christian religious contents, although their proximity to biblical subjects in compositions naturally implies Christian meanings.

This twofold aspect should advise caution against both 'over-interpretation' and 'under-interpretation' at the same time. While studying the Callistus catacomb in Rome, P. Finney asserts about 'neutral' elements that 'Nothing demands that the

⁷¹⁴ M. M. Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel' (1981), 293. H. G. Snyder used this Bakhtin quotation in his study. ('Pictures in Dialogue' (2005), 351).

⁷¹⁵ R. Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (2000), 17-8.

⁷¹⁶ V. Flocchi-Nicolai, F. Bisconti, D. Mazzoleni, *The Christian Catacombs of Rome* (2002²), 100.

people of the Callistus catacomb saw religious meanings in any of these subjects. Nor does anything forbid this possibility. [...] A *non liquet* seems to me the most intelligent solution.⁷¹⁷

There is an approach that attributes a less important, a mere decorative role to these 'neutral' elements. This opinion sees their main purpose in simply filling the remaining spaces between and around the biblical and/or mythological scenes and figures, which bear the real and profound meaning of the decoration. J. Pollini challenges this approach by analysing the floral ornaments of the *Ara Pacis Augustae* in Rome. He writes:

[...] the peoples of antiquity would have been more receptive to these floral and faunal images because of the greater appreciation among polytheistic peoples of the intimate relationship between nature and the divine. The plants, animals, and insects encountered so frequently in ancient art serve on occasion as symbols of human characteristics, virtues, or vices, as visual metonyms for various gods, or as manifestations of divine will.⁷¹⁸

The typically secondary and subordinate role of these elements in the general composition and iconographic agenda may suggest that the same images might have borne more or less significance, depending on the context. Although, in most cases, they did not express the commissioner's beliefs directly, they can be neglected from neither an artistic, nor an iconographic point of view. They were employed or adapted by the artists most probably without any further speculation or theological deliberation. They were familiar with them from other tombs in general.⁷¹⁹

There are a great number of plants (e.g. flowers, palm leaf) and animals (e.g. bird, peacock, sheep, goat, cattle) all around the catacombs, whose significance can be overlooked by an inexperienced viewer.⁷²⁰ According to E. Goodenough, they might seem merely 'formal' until it is noticed that they are rather interchangeable with similar motifs. He suggests that special attentiveness was required to recognise the aliveness and symbolism of 'formal' ornaments. Goodenough states that Christians

⁷¹⁷ P. Finney, *The Invisible God* (1994), 189.

⁷¹⁸ J. Pollini, 'The Acanthus of the Ara Pacis' (1993), 182.

⁷¹⁹ R. Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (2000), 18.

⁷²⁰ For the catalogue of motifs occurring in the Roman catacombs, see A. Nestori, *Repertorio topografico delle pitture delle catacombe romane* (1975).

adapted these forms to a lesser degree to express hope for immortality than Jews and pagans, who used them in a symbolic way, since ‘the garlands, wreaths, birds, Victories, starry ceilings, and the like, seem by no means to have lost their symbolic value in the ancient world.’⁷²¹

However, Goodenough also challenges the argument which states that if the designs have no symbolic meaning for today’s viewer, they could have had none for the ancient painters or those who commissioned the decorations either. Therefore, he denies that ‘early Christians wanted only “decoration,” and used formal motifs from mystic symbolism, mythology, and the Bible because these forms were familiar, but with no thought of their “religious” implications.’⁷²² On the contrary, he suggests that the foremost effect of these elements of decoration was that as they filled the spaces in the catacombs, they generated a particular atmosphere. This atmosphere could communicate the message of hope in funerary contexts appropriately, in a not too specific, but quite deep meaningful way.

10.1.2. *Marble imitation*

Among the ‘neutral’ elements, the decoration of the walls with painted marble imitation also needs mentioning. The purpose of this method was ‘to decorate architectural features and to replicate *opus sectile*’.⁷²³ These marble imitations were occasionally supplemented with the imitated fronts of sarcophagi or stuccoes (like in the Tomb No. 29 in Isola Sacra⁷²⁴ or the luxurious rooms of the *Hypogaeum* of Via Dino Compagni⁷²⁵). It also appears in the cemetery of Sopianae in the so-called Burial Chamber with the Jar. (Figure 34) There are a good number of parallels to this type of decoration of the Burial Chamber with the Jar in this place, I would like to refer only to the decoration of the so-called Case Romane on the Celian Hill in Rome (Figure 96 and Figure 97) and that of the Mausoleum of Iulii (or Mausoleum M) in the Vatican Necropolis under St Peter’s Basilica (Figure 98).

⁷²¹ E. Goodenough, ‘Catacomb Art’ (1962), 116.

⁷²² *Ibid.*, 116-7.

⁷²³ V. Flocchi-Nicolai, F. Bisconti, D. Mazzoleni, *The Christian Catacombs of Rome*, (2002²), 85.

⁷²⁴ K. McDonnell ‘Funerary Cult and Architecture’ (2014), 274.

⁷²⁵ A. Ferrua, *Le pitture della nuova catacomba di Via Latina* (1960); W. Tronzo, *The Via Latina Catacomb* (1986); I. Camiruaga et al., *La arquitectura del hipogeo de la via Latina en Roma* (1994); F. Bisconti, *Il restauro dell’ipogeo di Via Dino Compagni* (2003).

As it has been noted in Chapter 5.1.1, there was an attempt to copy the Roman *domus* in the settings of Roman tombs.⁷²⁶ Thus, the conventional division, which characterised domestic buildings, was employed in funerary contexts as well. According to Roman architectural customs, the space of a room was divided into three sections. The wall was typically separated into three horizontal, painted zones: a dado, a middle space (often divided into three areas) and a frieze and cornice.⁷²⁷ The painted marble imitations were predominantly used at the socket of the *cubicula*.

The ‘pseudo-veneer’, which is an economical substitute for real marble, particularly in the dado, gained popularity from Diocletian’s reign in the late third century. From the time of the Tetrarchy, it reached its zenith, when already whole walls were decorated in this way and there were rooms where the imitation of incrustation became the decoration’s main motif.⁷²⁸ To reproduce the opulent environment created in the houses of the new senatorial aristocracy, brightly coloured rectangular, diamond-shaped and circular panels imitated the various kinds of marbles and breccias.⁷²⁹ Hence, the imitation served a social aim, namely to replicate the aristocratic environment for both the resting place of the deceased and the visiting place of their household.

10.1.3. *Vessels and containers*

Among the so-called ‘neutral’ elements, vessels and other containers also form a particular group. They are not only elements of decoration, depicted or inscribed, but also occur physically in the tombs. Consequently, their iconographic explanation is significantly influenced by researches and theories of Christian archaeology. Kitchen utensils, bottles and other glass or ceramic containers seem to be relevant to funerary banquets and the *refrigerium* both in a generic and summative way.⁷³⁰ Since, their significance is ambivalent (or possibly multivalent), their interpretation

⁷²⁶ B. Green, *Christianity in ancient Rome* (2010), 198-9.

⁷²⁷ M. Wheeler, *Roman art and architecture* (1964); M. Henig (ed.), *A Handbook of Roman art* (1983).

⁷²⁸ F. Rickert, ‘Inkrustation’ (1998); H. Mielsch, *Römische Wandmalerei* (2001), 124.

⁷²⁹ R. Ling, *Roman painting* (1991), 192.

⁷³⁰ V. Fiocchi-Nicolai, F. Bisconti, D. Mazzoleni, *The Christian Catacombs of Rome* (2002²), 113.

in archaeology oscillates between regarding them as mere decorations, funerary equipment or items in a hypothesized symbolic meal.⁷³¹

J. Engemann notices that there is a particular attitude behind the tendency of attributing cultic significance to everyday vessels. Significantly higher archaeological value and importance are attached to those vessels or objects that were either used during the celebration of the Eucharist, were a gift for baptism or were made for funerary purposes.⁷³² According to him, this attitude is triggered by the difficulty of abstracting the archaeological findings from their relevance to the present, particularly in cases where a museum or a collection has ecclesiastical regards to the objects as well.

Thus, the temptation of over-interpreting items of quotidian life (either real or depicted) as sacral objects is to be avoided.⁷³³ However, in many cases, desacralizing explanations in early Christian iconography also give the impression of insufficiency.⁷³⁴ Therefore, Engemann's suggestion is to explain the significance of the vessels and other similar objects as symbolic articles that played an important role in everyday life in the early Christian period in a more impartial way than they would typically do today.⁷³⁵

10.2. The Significance of the Jar

The only figures found in the niche scooped into the northern wall of the burial vault are a jar and glass. (Figure 35) The bluish green colour of the vessels shows that these are depictions of glass vessels. Both vessel types can be defined. The conic cup was very popular through the whole of the fourth century. The shape of the wine jar is more specific. It has one bail and its neck is cone shaped. The shape

⁷³¹ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁷³² J. Engemann, 'Anmerkungen zu spätantiken Geräten des Alltagslebens' (1972), 156.

⁷³³ As early as in 1932, J. Braun warned against regarding all table device from the early Christian period as Christian liturgical vessels, even if they were decorated with biblical scenes or religious motifs. (J. Braun, *Das christliche Altargerät in seinem Sein und in seiner Entwicklung* (1932), 201. 208. 266).

⁷³⁴ For example, when the Sheep Bearer is regarded as the symbol of philanthropy, rather than a reference to the Good Shepherd. (T. Klauser, 'Studien zur Entstehungsgeschichte der christlichen Kunst, VII' (1964), 67-76).

⁷³⁵ J. Engemann, 'Anmerkungen zu spätantiken Geräten des Alltagslebens' (1972), 157.

of the vessel is neither ball, nor coil, rather its belly looks like an egg standing on its broader side. Glass vessels whose shape is similar to the form of this painted one but not the same are more typically found in the southern rather than the northern part of Pannonia.

It is worth taking a look at the artefacts in the grave from Pannonia in the fourth century to see whether this composition of the wine jar and cup occurs only on a wall painting, or in reality as well. The analysis of these vessels' occurrences in the northern part of Roman Pannonia has been done by a Hungarian archaeologist, E. Tóth.⁷³⁶ There are several Roman graves from the province of Pannonia which contained artefacts like a plate, a cup and in many cases also a jug.

One of these is a 0.33 m tall jar in dark blue colour. (Figure 99) It was found together with a glass cup and a glazed dish in a late Roman grave at Mosdós (Southwest Hungary) in 1923 and is held in the Rippl-Rónai Museum in Kaposvár. The jar is dated to the second half of the fourth century. Its pear-shaped appearance imitates similar metal vessels. Its bottom is flat. This jar is unique among the grave findings from Pannonia: there is no other cobalt blue glass jar in such size and condition from the fourth century.

The presence of these vessels can be explained on the grounds of Roman funerary traditions. The custom of a funeral meal, which was shared by the mourners and the deceased, was commonly spread in the empire. The kitchen utensils were essentially used for eating and drinking at these funeral meals. It is very likely that they contained food and drink as it is indicated by the remains of animal bones near them in some cases and by the depictions carved in gravestones.

The presence of a cup and a jar in a grave is much more infrequent than the one of a plate and a cup. The different usage must indicate a different, i.e. symbolic meaning. The importance of this symbol is emphasized by the fact that its position is central in the burial chamber. Especially as the other paintings on the walls are only marble incrustation and vine tendrils. The connection of the wine jar and the cup to the *refrigerium* is obvious.

But they also express the afterlife faith of the people who built or had the graves built. Because a jar and a cup are containers of liquids, it seems evidential

⁷³⁶ E. Tóth, 'A pogány és keresztény Sopianae' [The Pagan and Christian Sopianae] (2006), 71-82.

that the intention was to protect the deceased, especially from thirst in the after-life. It was a common belief in the Mediterranean region that the thirst of the one who roams and wanders in the other world must be alleviated by the ones who are alive. But this theory was accepted not only by 'pagans' but by Christians as well. Some examples are the parable of the poor Lazarus and the rich man from the *Gospel of Luke* (16:20) or Perpetua's vision of her brother, the child Dinocrates.⁷³⁷

10.3. A. Brent's Wittgentsteinian Interpretation

In his iconographic interpretation of the Burial Chamber with the Jar, Allen Brent aims

to reconstruct the fourth and fifth century non-verbal, iconographic discourse whose meaning derives from common pagan and early Christian elements that are not mutually exclusive but interact with one another in a shared web of meaning.⁷³⁸

He challenges those empiricist and therefore reductionist tendencies (by F. Gerke⁷³⁹ and F. Fülep⁷⁴⁰) that in the process of understanding take only the artefact itself and its viewer into account. This kind of methodology seems to forget that the interaction between an artefact and its viewer cannot be separated from other similar interactions between other artefacts and other viewers all at the same time in the frame of a shared life and the 'cross-cultic referentialism' around the Roman Empire (cf. Chapter 1.3.2). These innumerable interactions formed a great web of 'language games' (Chapter 1.2.1) based on 'family resemblances' (Chapter 1.2.2) in the Wittgensteinian sense, and existed among the different viewers and the different artefacts respectively.

Brent argues that some of the iconographic elements appearing in the Sopianae cemetery and particularly in the Burial Chamber with the Jar, were also present in other sites from the third and fourth centuries, thus they represent such a

⁷³⁷ *Passio Sanctarum Martyrum Perpetuae et Felicitatis* 2.3 (PL 3, 34); J. N. Bremmer, 'Perpetua u. Felicitas' (2016).

⁷³⁸ A. Brent, 'Methodological Perspectives in the Interpretation of Early Christian Artefacts' (2014), 8.

⁷³⁹ F. Gerke, 'Die Wandmalereien der neugefundenen Grabkammer in Pécs' (1952), 116-7.

⁷⁴⁰ F. Fülep, *Sopianae* (1984), 45.

shared conceptual background between ‘pagans’ and Christians of the era ‘in which a logic of synthesis and mutual understanding rather than of exclusion and contradiction is operative’.⁷⁴¹

Brent asserts that the iconographic elements of the wine jar (Figure 39), the vine tendrils (Figure 31 and Figure 35), the fenced garden (Figure 32, Figure 33 and Figure 36) and the table for a funerary meal (Figure 37), which are present in the Burial Chamber with the Jar, are not an arbitrary collection and do not stand alone. They together refer to the *refrigerium*, a refreshment meal for the dead, which was rich in meaning both in Graeco-Roman ‘paganism’ as well as in early Christianity.⁷⁴² The interrelationship of these images formed part of a shared, iconographic discourse, ‘whose conceptual vagueness enables new possibilities implicit in the language game to be actualized in new ways’.⁷⁴³

This referential plurality of the *refrigerium* was based on the shared customs and ‘language games’ in late Roman society, and generated a living dialogue between the manifold forms of life of people. The concept of the *refrigerium* and its non-verbal, artistic representations are exempt of any exhaustive definition, and consequently are adequately open-ended to play many roles in various dynamic interactions.

Brent hypothesises that in the iconographic program of the Burial Chamber with the Jar, there were not only concrete, actual iconographic references to the *refrigerium* meal present, but potential ones as well. The potential ones can be found in other similar contexts and connect to those elements that are used and actually present in the particular place through the ‘family resemblance’ in the Wittgensteinian sense. The potential elements were not depicted in the Burial Chamber with the Jar in reality, but theoretically, they might have been, since they are all elements of a common ‘language game’ which follows the same logic.⁷⁴⁴

⁷⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁷⁴² *Ibid.*

⁷⁴³ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁷⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 38.

10.4. Conclusion

So making allowance for the whole iconographic program of this burial chamber and the possible interpretations of its core motif, the wine jar and cup, it can be presumed that the religious identity of this grave cannot be defined unambiguously. What F. Bisconti ascertained about the vessel findings in the catacombs is true about these vessel symbols, too: 'their significance resided in their ambivalent and multivalent role that oscillated between decoration and funerary equipment.'⁷⁴⁵ Probably, it is not an accident that there are no special Christian symbols in this tomb, which otherwise stands amongst graves that are full of biblical pictures or at least signed by painted Christograms (e.g., Figure 44, Figure 45, Figure 52). Nevertheless, the decoration of this burial chamber is special in Sopianae because it could convey meaning to both a Christian and non-Christian viewer at the same time. However, it cannot be excluded either that the commissioners of this tomb were such people who could not or more probably did not want to choose a distinct and separate iconographic expression for their afterlife beliefs.

Describing the situation in Wittgensteinian terminology, this burial chamber took part in a 'language game' which occurred among Christian and non-Christian owners and visitors. A non-verbal 'grammar' of imagery was working which shaped the meaning of the iconographic program of the chamber without strictly determining a single significance. The interpretative field of the decoration remained open. It had not a limiting, but rather inclusive character and function.

⁷⁴⁵ V. Fiocchi-Nicolai, F. Bisconti, D. Mazzoleni, *The Christian Catacombs of Rome* (2002²), 81.

11. Conclusion

11.1. Summary

The aim of the present thesis has been to reveal some shades of identity through the study of the Late Antique funerary monuments in Sopianae. These shades unfolded via the iconographic analyses of the wall paintings of a number of burial chambers. Although the funerary context determines the framework of interpretation (thus early Christian artefacts predominantly belong to this particular context), the images present a great amount of the religious, social and cultural identities of the grave owners. The people who had commissioned these cemetery buildings and their decorations expressed their own identities through these monuments by various means.

The iconographic compositions were used to mediate the message about the commissioners' identities in such a way that was certainly recognizable and understandable in the contemporaneous environment. The biblical scenes, the figures from the gospels and other well-known iconographic elements of funerary contexts, such as birds, floral and other decorative motifs, were suitable tools to represent the intended religious contents in the context of the cemetery the way they were present in their lives. They served as 'words' and 'sentences' in a 'language game' that was naturally 'spoken' in Late Antiquity and the people in Sopianae understood and used it in the same way as in any other part of the Roman Empire.

The various analyses of this study have revealed that the peculiarity of the Sopianae wall paintings is that they were not peculiar. They show the same characteristics as other similar artefacts from Rome or other parts of the Roman Empire from the period. They seem to form one single 'family'. However, it is also undeniable, that there are different levels of resemblance in this 'family'. The closest 'iconographic relatives' and obvious parallels of certain elements or compositions have been demonstrated at various stages of this study. This complex matrix of

connections represents the dynamism and organic character of Late Roman society. Those ancient people of Sopianae whose cemetery has been studied on these pages added their own shades of identity to the great palette of Late Antiquity.

11.2. Further Perspectives

One of the main difficulties faced during the studies of Pannonia was methodological. There are historical and social factors that are peculiar to the research of Pannonia, some of which characterize the studies of early Christian monuments from Roman Pannonia in particular.

There are several modern countries that share or used to share the territory of ancient Pannonia, such as Austria, Slovakia, Hungary and Yugoslavia. This diverse situation has been further complicated since the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia, when the group of countries possessing the remains of the Pannonian past was expanded to include Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia. And if the whole Balkans is regarded as a single region sharing a similar historical, cultural and religious heritage from Late Antiquity, the number of the modern countries is multiplied. These countries have various attitudes to the Roman period of their history and as a consequence, to the material monuments of the era. The financial sources, the institutional structure and background, the academic traditions and attitudes are also quite different in the abovementioned countries. Therefore, the effectiveness of conservation, exhibition and research of Late Antique and early Christian artefacts from Pannonia has varied considerably.

In Rome, the cataloguing and publication of early Christian artefacts has been done at a high academic level for a significant time thanks to the Pontifical Commission of Sacred Archaeology and the numerous researchers from around the world, and the results are easily accessible. In contrast, the process of this work in the case of Pannonia happened at a slower pace and the outcome can be summarized with only much greater efforts because of the aforementioned fragmentation of states and the linguistic obstacles in the region. Most of the publications are in the various languages of the researchers, which makes the exchange of ideas

among scholars more difficult and the Western academia are excluded from the discussion in many cases.

This exclusive character of the region was further amplified by the history of the second half of the twentieth century. After the Second World War, this region of Europe was ruled by the Soviets and largely secluded from other parts of the world. The Christian past and traditions of these countries were against the predominant official ideology, which was declared as atheist and anti-religious. This attitude of the states in the Eastern Block did not prompt the investigation of the early Christian monuments and wide publication.

After the political changes in Eastern Europe in 1989 and the horrific wars in the Balkans in the 1990s, the dawn of a more suitable milieu for the research of early Christianity in Pannonia has arrived. There are projects building on academic and institutional cooperation between Pannonia-rooted countries inspired and financed by the European Union, most of which countries became members of that institution in the first decade of the new millennium.

There is significant unutilized potential in the comprehensive and comparative analysis of early Christian and Late Antique artefacts from the Roman province of Pannonia and more widely from the whole Balkan area. The significance of the painted burial chambers in the Sopiana cemetery can be construed in the framework of contemporaneous artistic and iconographic traditions. The impact of Roman catacomb paintings and images of other media is undeniable. As Rome's influence has been demonstrated in the research history of Sopiana in numerous cases from the early eighteenth century, the aim has also been to highlight and evidence this in this present study. Frequent reference has been made to architectural and iconographic parallels from the Balkans notwithstanding the reliance of these analyses on less extensive considerations and traditions of academic research.

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Appendix

1. Maps

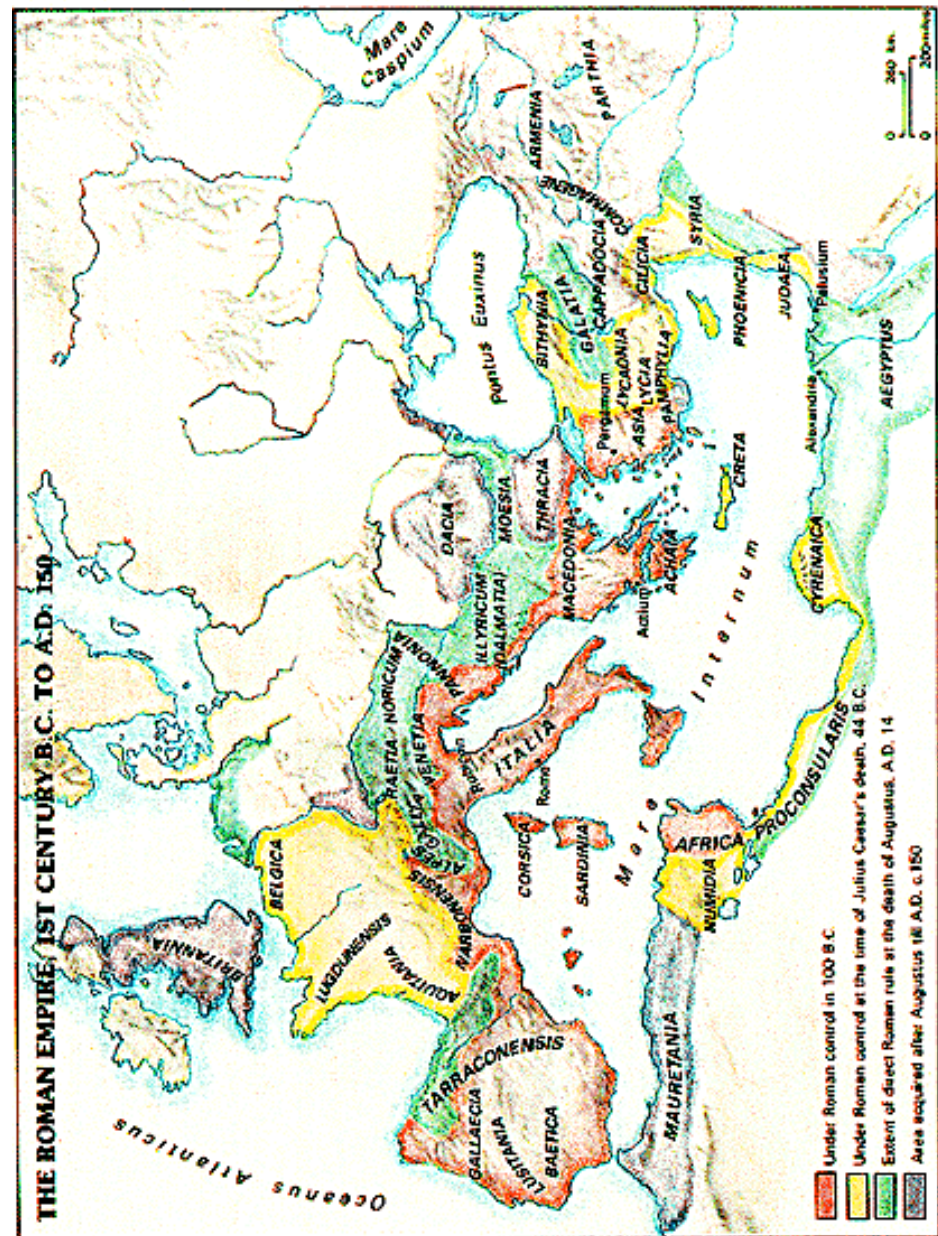


Figure 1 Pannonia in the Roman Empire in the 1st century AD (The Zondervan Atlas of the Bible)



Figure 4 Archaeological findings in the area of Roman Sopianae (K. Hudák, *A Fine and Private Place*, 6.)

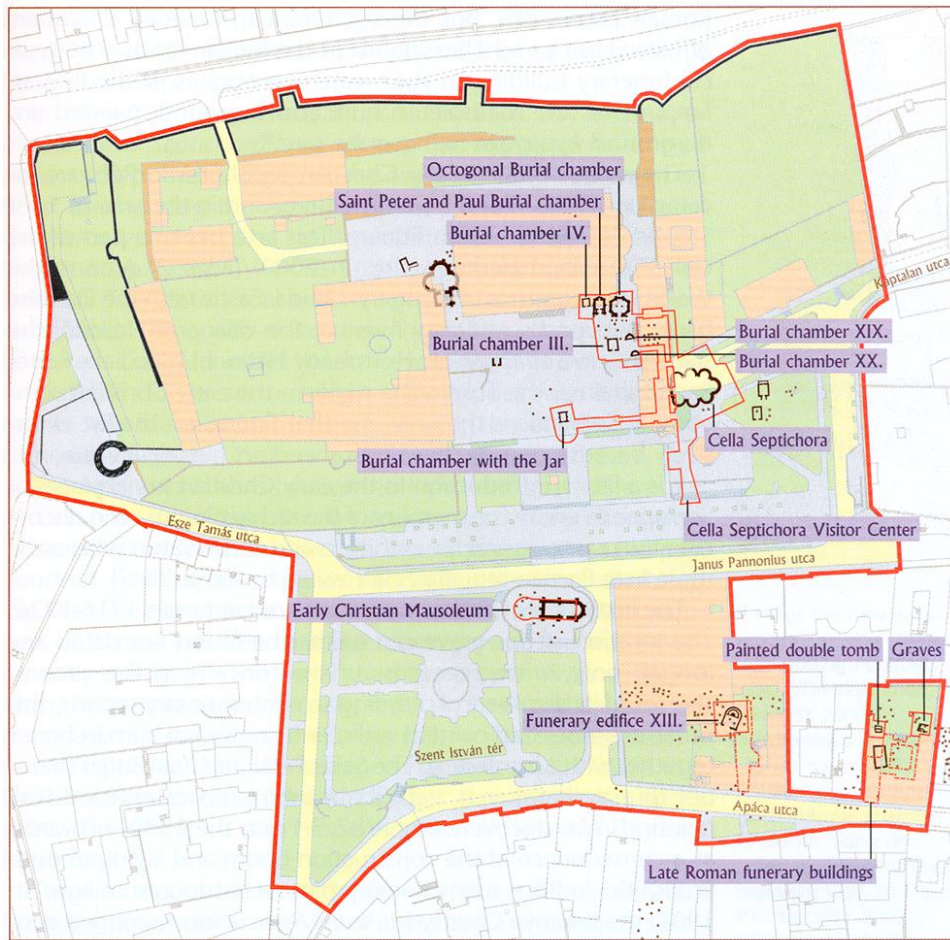


Figure 5 Funerary buildings of Sopianae's Late Antique cemetery in the modern city centre of Pécs (K. Hudák, *A Fine and Private Place*, 11.)

2. SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber, Sopianae (Pécs)

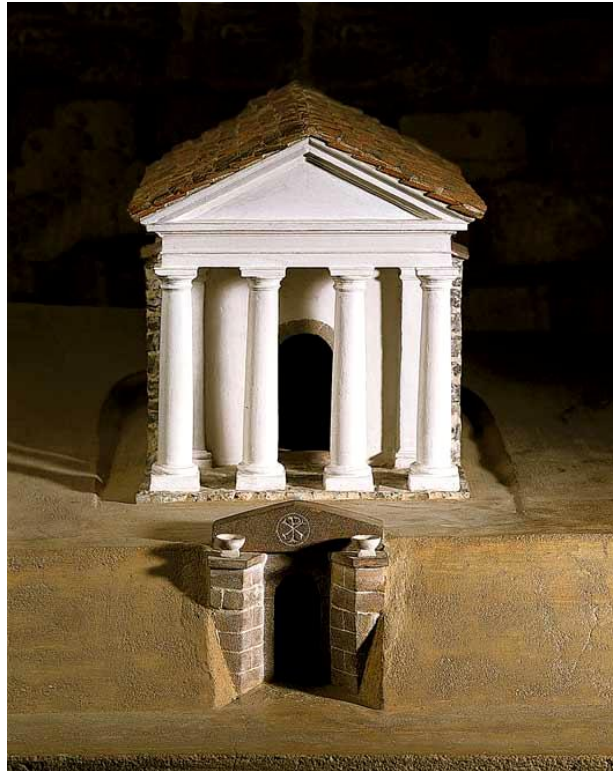


Figure 6 Reconstruction of the SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber (Visitor Centre, Pécs)



Figure 7 The SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber in the 19th century (Tivadar Dörre's drawing)



Figure 8 Imre Henszelmann's reconstruction of the ceiling and side walls of the SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber



Figure 9 Reconstruction of the western side wall of the SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber (Visitor Centre, Pécs)

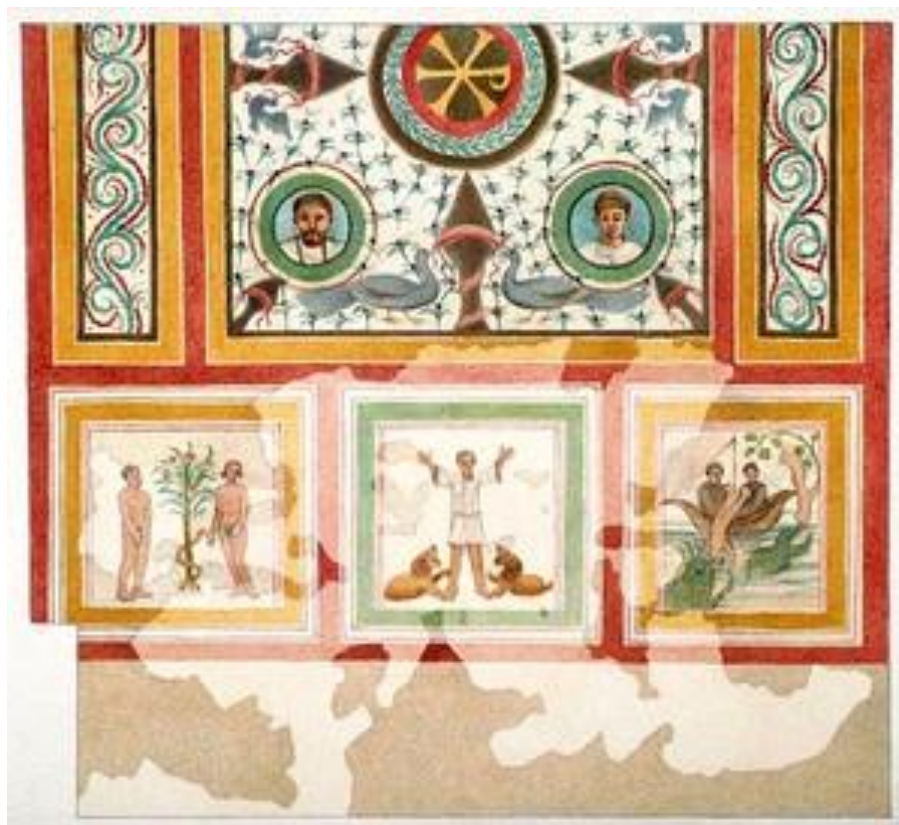


Figure 10 Reconstruction of the eastern side wall of the SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber (Visitor Centre, Pécs)



Figure 11 Interior of the SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber

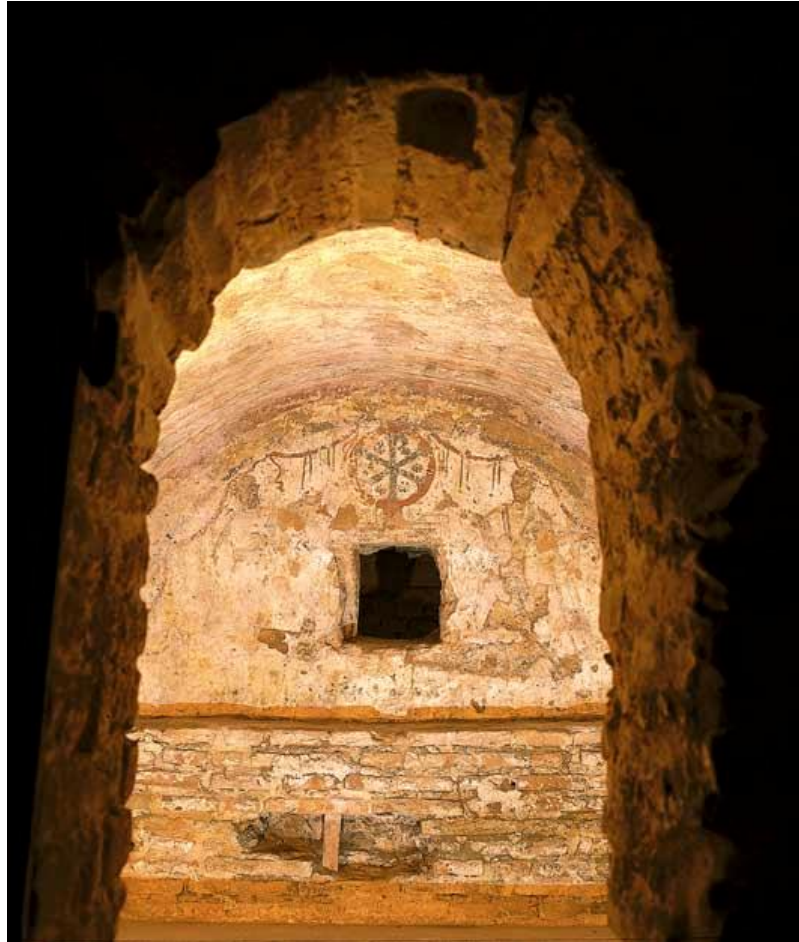


Figure 12 The entrance of the SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber

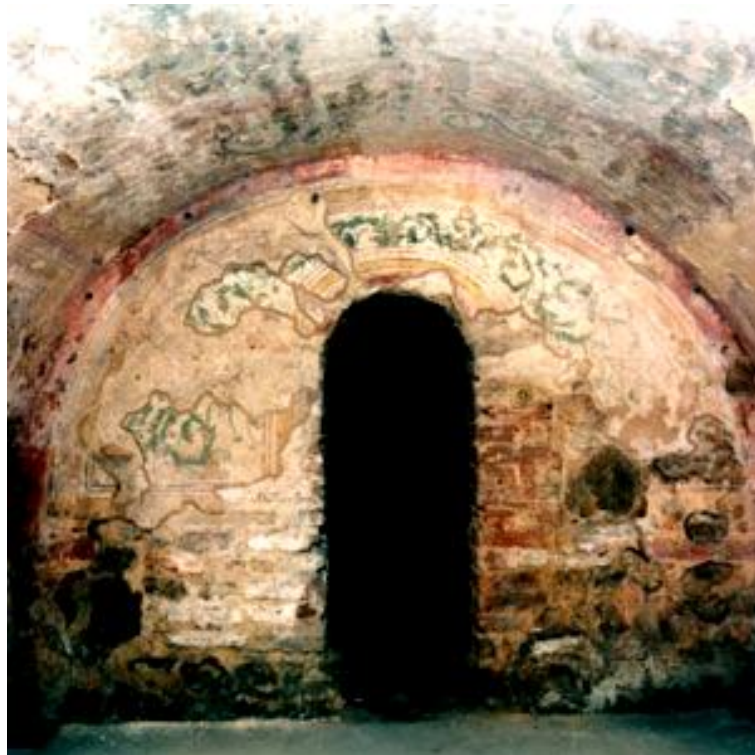


Figure 13 Interior of the SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber towards the entrance



Figure 14 The perspective of the viewer when entering the SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber



Figure 15 The barrel vault of the SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber



Figure 16 The four medallions in the SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber



Figure 17 The northern wall of the SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber



Figure 18 Peter and Paul pointing to the Christogram in the SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber



Figure 19 The *fenestella* in the SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber in Sopianae



Figure 20 Christogram on the northern wall of the SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber

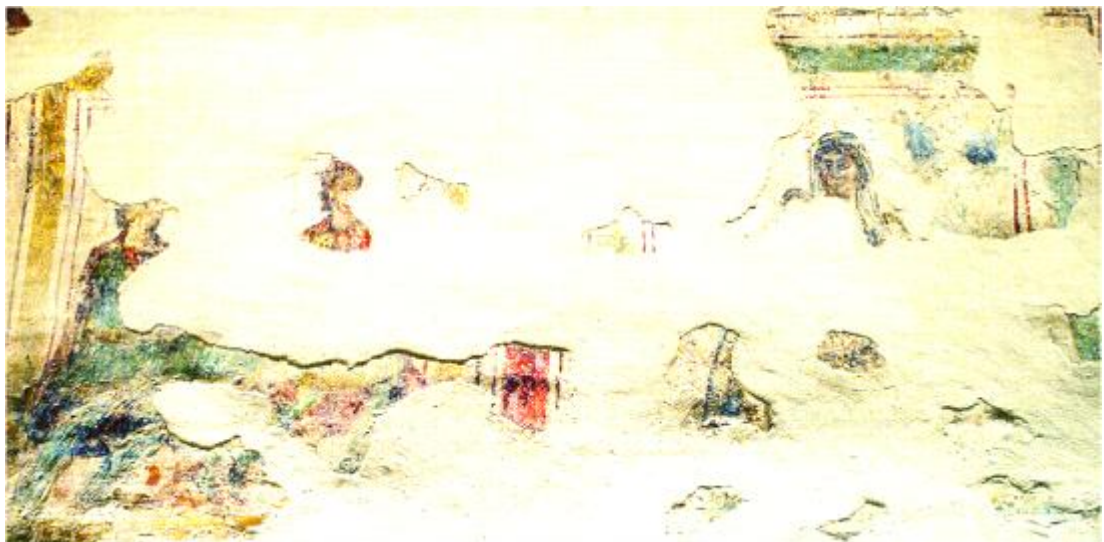


Figure 21 Two panels on the western side wall of the SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber



Figure 22 Detail of the middle panel on the western wall



Figure 23 The ambiguous image on the western side wall of the SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber



Figure 24 Deatil of the ambiguous panel on the western wall in the SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber



Figure 25 Noah on the western wall of the SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber



Figure 26 Detail of the first panel on the eastern side wall of the SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber



Figure 27 Jonah on the eastern wall in the SS Peter and Paul Burial Chamber

3. Burial Chamber with the Jar, Sopianae (Pécs)



Figure 28 Remains of the upper level of the Burial Chamber with the Jar ('Korsós')



Figure 29 Entrance to the Burial Chamber with the Jar on the underground level



Figure 30 Panoramic view of the Burial Chamber with the Jar



Figure 31 The Burial Chamber with the Jar in Sopiana



Figure 32 Back of the Burial Chamber with the Jar, 1



Figure 33 Back of the Burial Chamber with the Jar, 2



Figure 34 Marble imitation in the Burial Chamber with the Jar



Figure 35 The main wall of the Burial Chamber with the Jar



Figure 36 Fence motif on the side wall in the Burial Chamber with the Jar



Figure 37 Detail of the decoration in the Burial Chamber with the Jar



Figure 38 The decoration of the back wall in the Burial Chamber with the Jar



Figure 39 The jar motif in the niche of the Burial Chamber with the Jar

4. Other Funerary Buildings in the Sopianae cemetery



Figure 40 The Early Christian Mausoleum in Sopianae



Figure 41 The interior of the Early Christian Mausoleum in Sopianae



Figure 42 Christogram on the back wall of the Early Christian Mausoleum in Sopianae

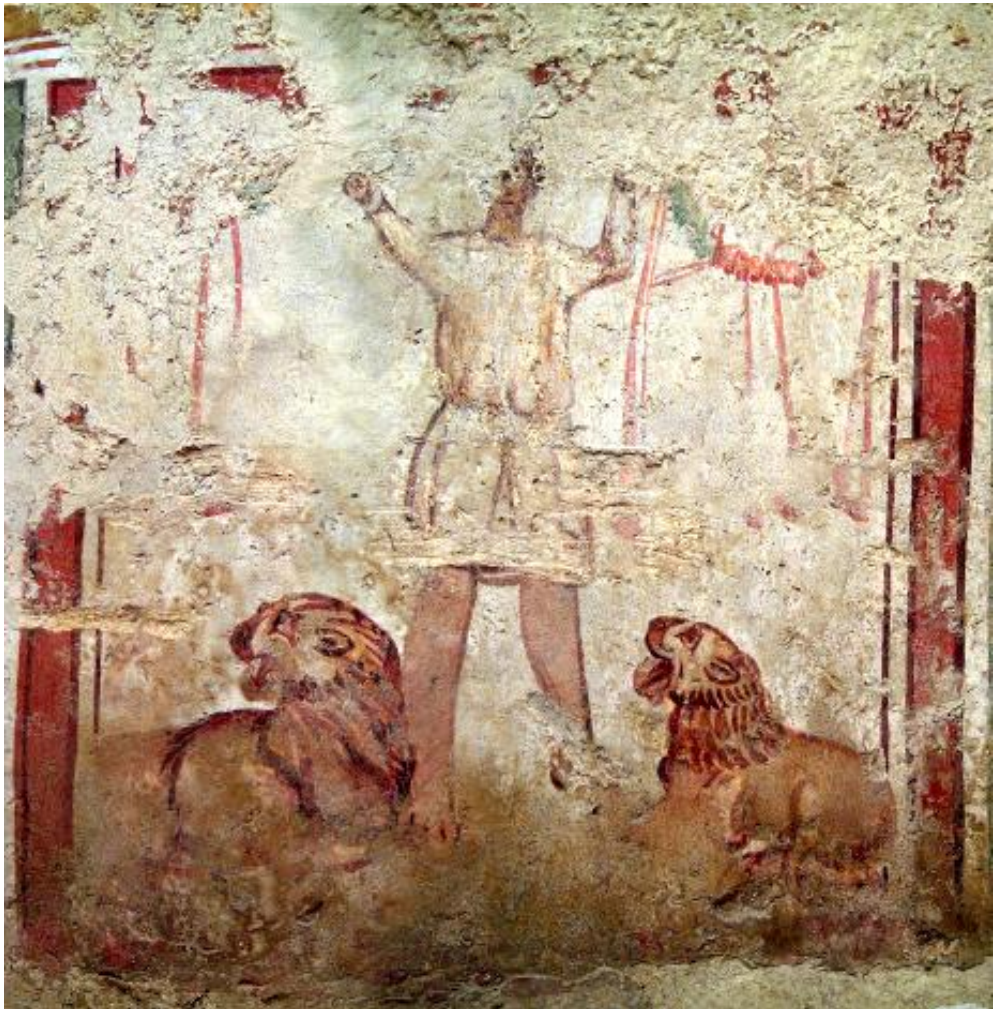


Figure 43 Daniel's image in the Early Christian Mausoleum in Sopianae



Figure 44 Christogram in the double grave of 8 Apáca Street in Sopianae



Figure 45 The inside decoration of Burial Chamber No. XX in Sopianae

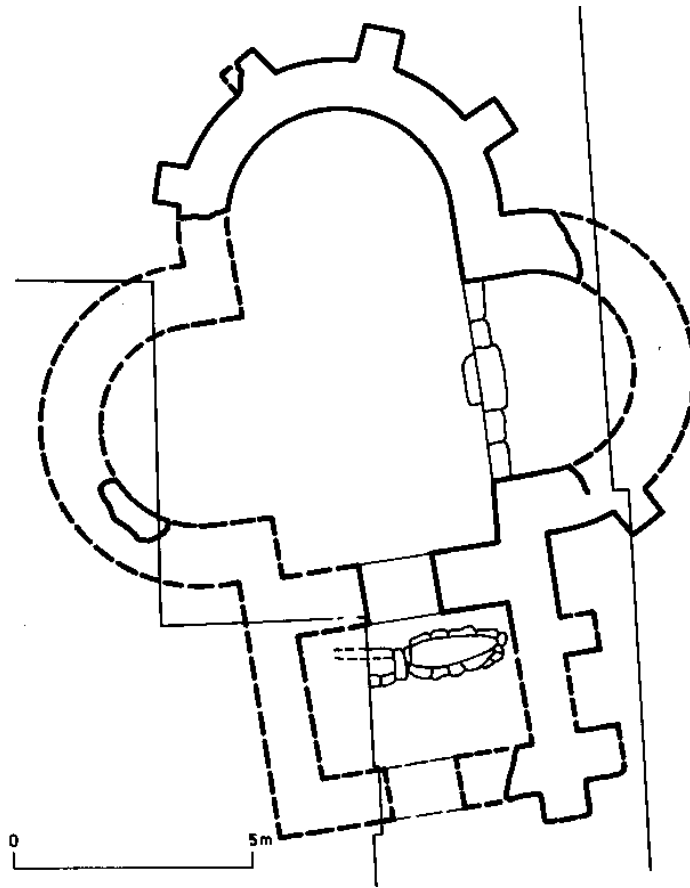


Figure 46 The layout of the first *cella trichora* in Sopianae

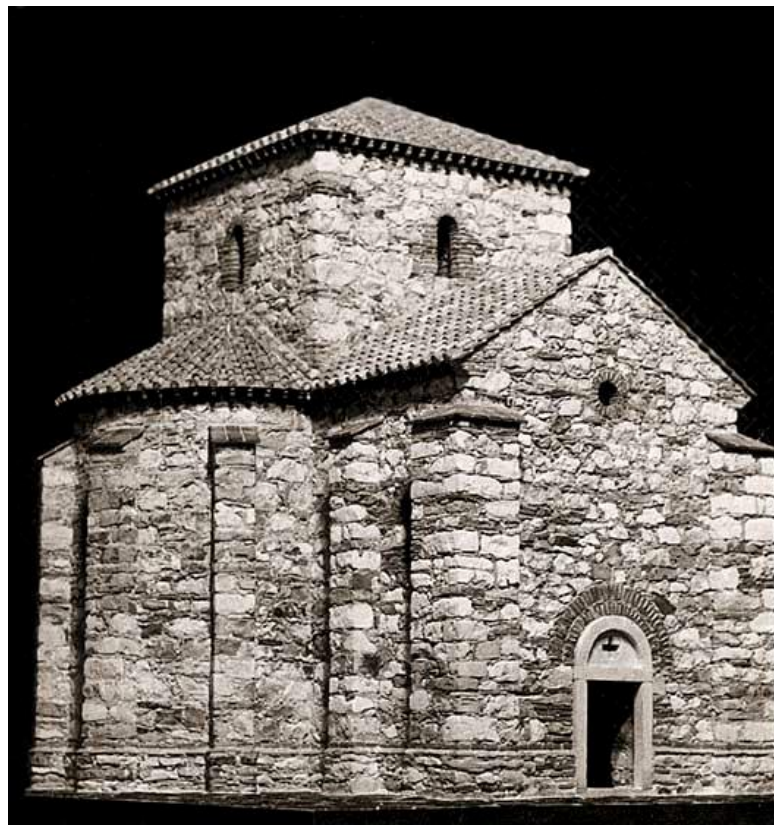


Figure 47 Reconstruction of the Cella Trichora (Visitor Centre, Pécs)



Figure 48 The second *cella trichora* excavated in 2011 in Sopiana



Figure 49 The *Cella Septichora* in Sopiana, 1



Figure 50 The *Cella Septichora* in Sopiana, 2



Figure 51 The excavation of Burial Chamber V in Sopiana



Figure 52 Bronze Christogram from Sopianae

5. Parallels (outside of Sopianae)



Figure 53 Birds and floral motifs in Santa Constanza, Rome



Figure 54 A hunting scene from the Roman Villa in Centcelles (Spain)



Figure 55 Mosaic floor in Huarte (Syria)

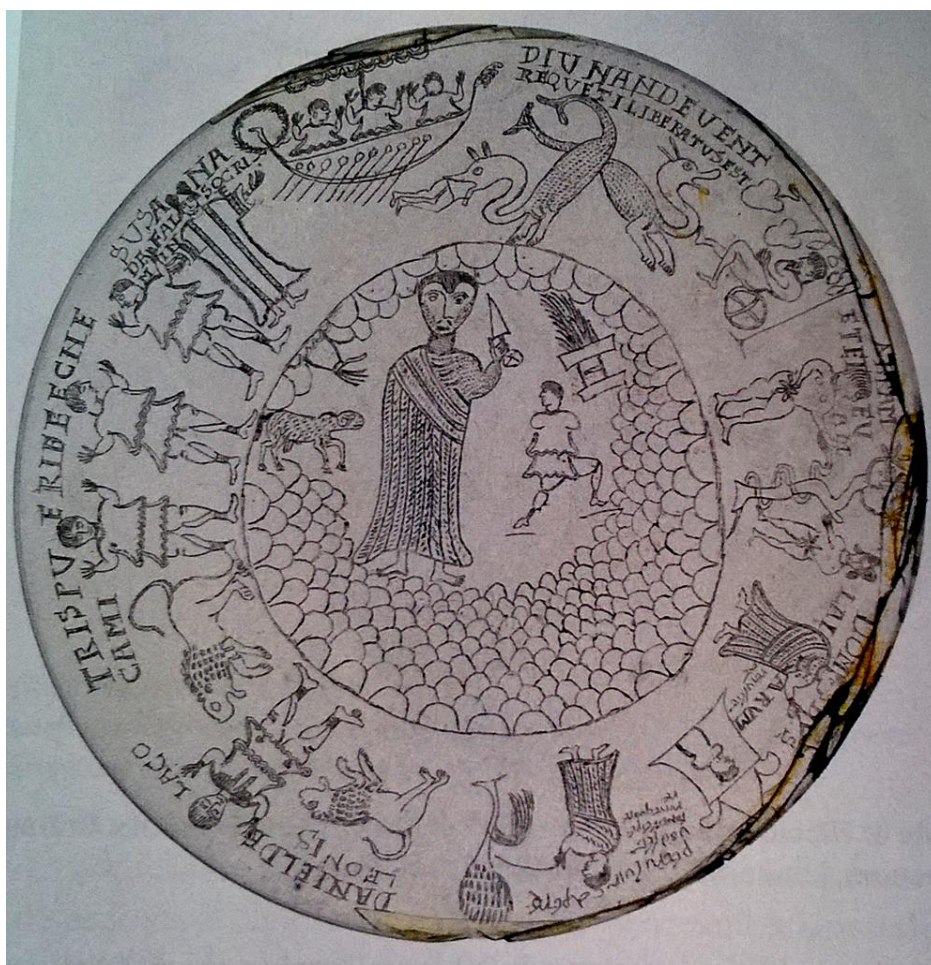


Figure 56 The Podgoritzza Plate (The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg)



Figure 57 Central image on the Podgoritzza Plate (P. Levi, 'The Podgoritzza Cup', 53.)

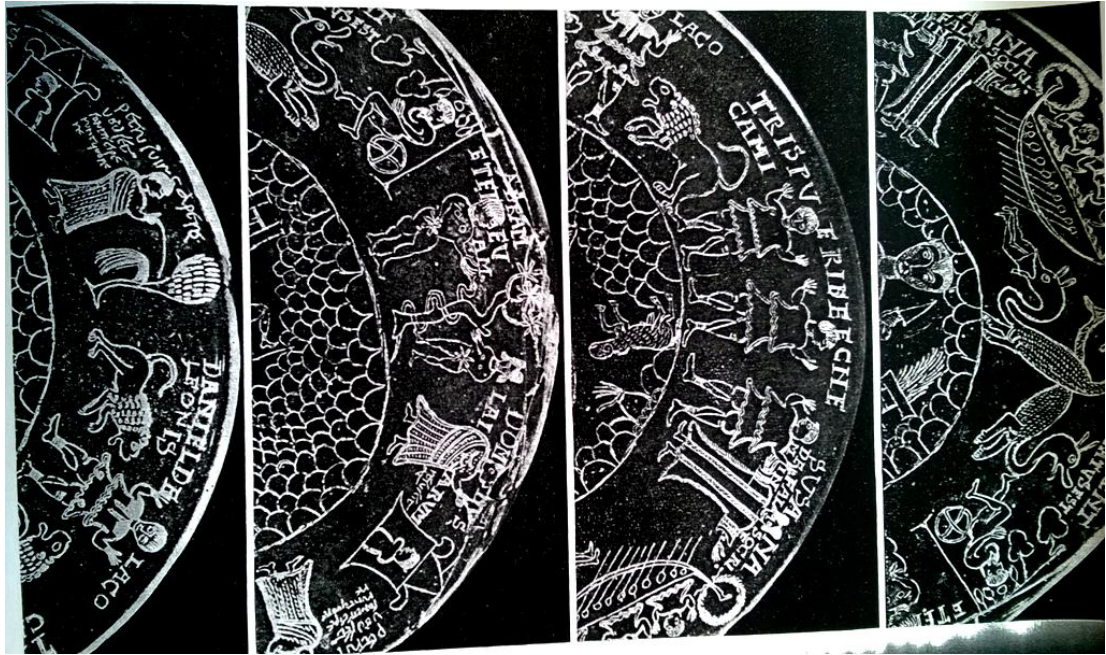


Figure 58 Details of the perimeter of the Podgoritza Plate (P. Levi, 'The Podgoritza Cup', 54.)

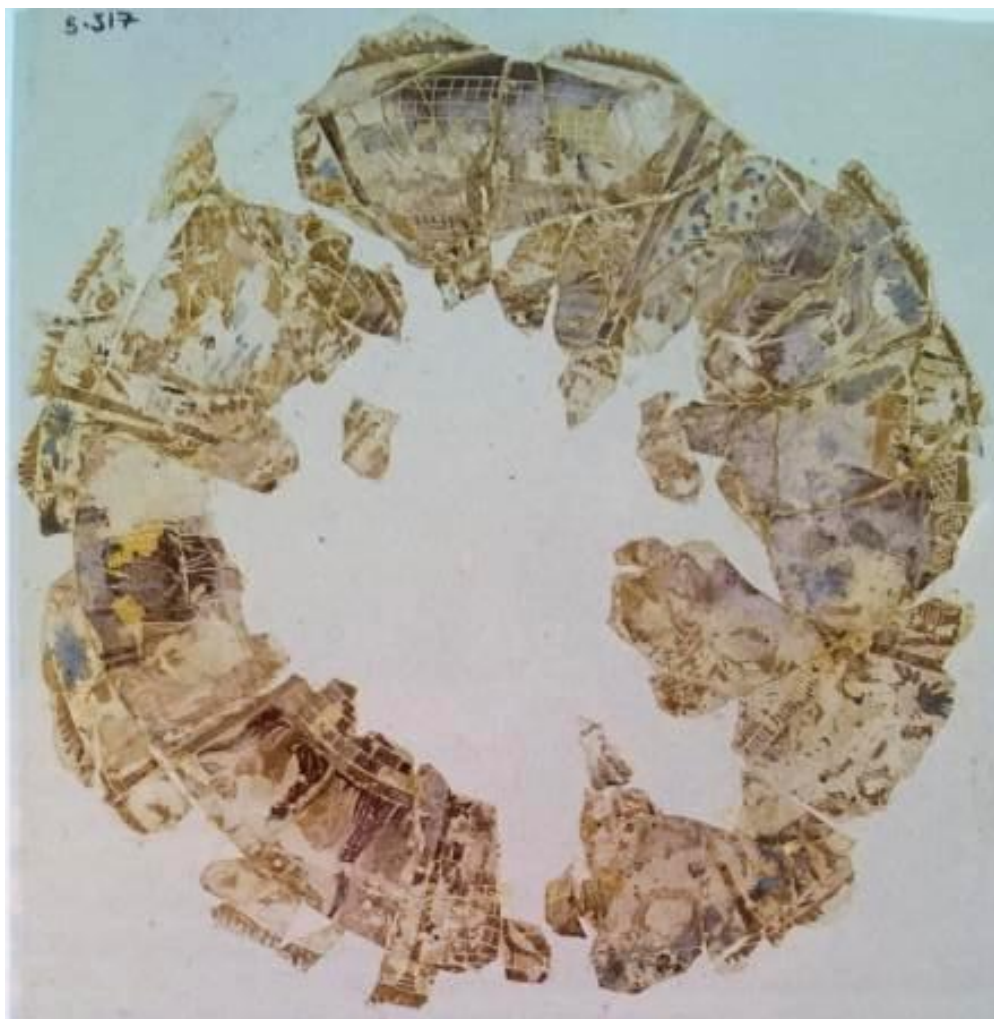


Figure 59 The St Ursula bowl (British Museum, London) (D. Howells, *A Catalogue of the Late Antique Gold Glass in the British Museum*, 101.)



Figure 60 Roman mausoleum in La Alberca (Spain)



Figure 61 The Anastasius Mausoleum in Marusinac (Croatia), 1



Figure 62 The Anastasius Mausoleum, 2

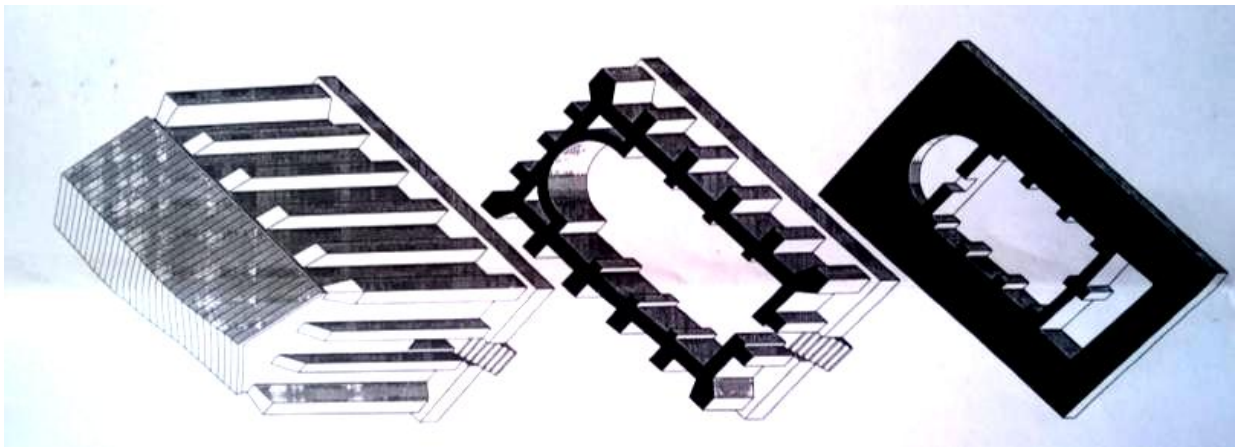


Figure 63 Axonometric reconstruction first floor and crypt of the Anastasius Mausoleum, Salona, Marusinac (S. Ćurčić, *Architecture in the Balkans*, 61.)



Figure 64 The image of Petronilla and Veneranda in the Catacomb of Domitilla (Rome)

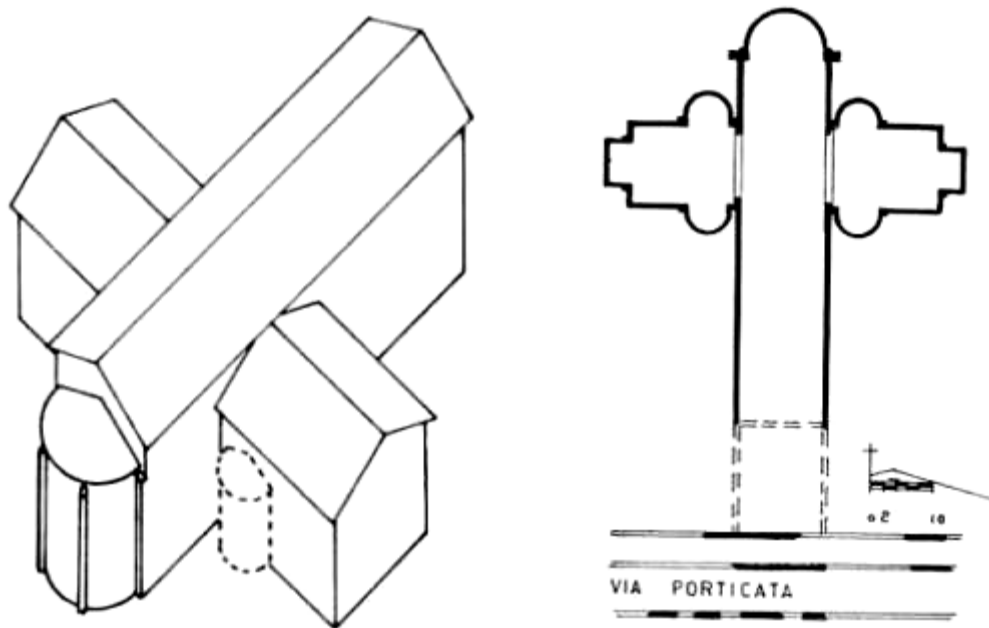


Figure 65 The isometric reconstruction and the layout of the 4th-century *Basilica Apostolorum* (Milan)



Figure 66 The Basilica Ambrosiana today (Milan)



Figure 67 The crypt of Sant' Ambrogio basilica in Milan. Embossed silver urn, displaying the relics of SS Ambrose, Gervasius and Protasius



Figure 68 The St Gereon Church (Cologne)



Figure 69 The vault of the Cubicle of the Apostles in the Catacomb of Thecla (Rome)



Figure 70 The four medallions in the Cubicle of the Apostle in the Catacomb of Thecla



Figure 71 Wall painting of Christ, Peter, Paul and the saints of the Catacomb of Peter and Marcellinus in Rome



Figure 72 Christ with the apostles in the Cubicle of the 'Great Apostles' in the Catacomb of Domitilla in Rome



Figure 73 Christ and the apostles in the Crypt of the Bakers in the Catacomb of Domitilla



Figure 74 Paul's figure in the Cubicle of Diogenes in the Catacomb of Domitilla



Figure 75 Peter and Paul in the Arcosolium of the 'Small Apostles' in the Catacomb of Domitilla



Figure 76 *Arsosolium* with mosaic decoration in the Catacomb of Domitilla



Figure 77 Christ's portrait in the Catacomb of Commodilla in Rome



Figure 78 The Epitaph of Asellus (Vatican Museums)



Figure 79 Gold glass medallion with Peter and Paul (New York)



Figure 80 Wall painting from Cubicle No. 9 in the Via Latina Catacomb in Rome

Early Christograms

✠ = ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ

✠ = ΙΗCOYC ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ

III = ΙΗCOYC

☩ = In NT manuscripts (P75, P66, P45), in abbreviated forms of σταυρω and σταυρος, e.g., σϣος

Figure 81 Types of early Christograms (L. Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artefacts*, 154.)



Figure 82 The 'Tree' Sarcophagus (Vatican Museums)

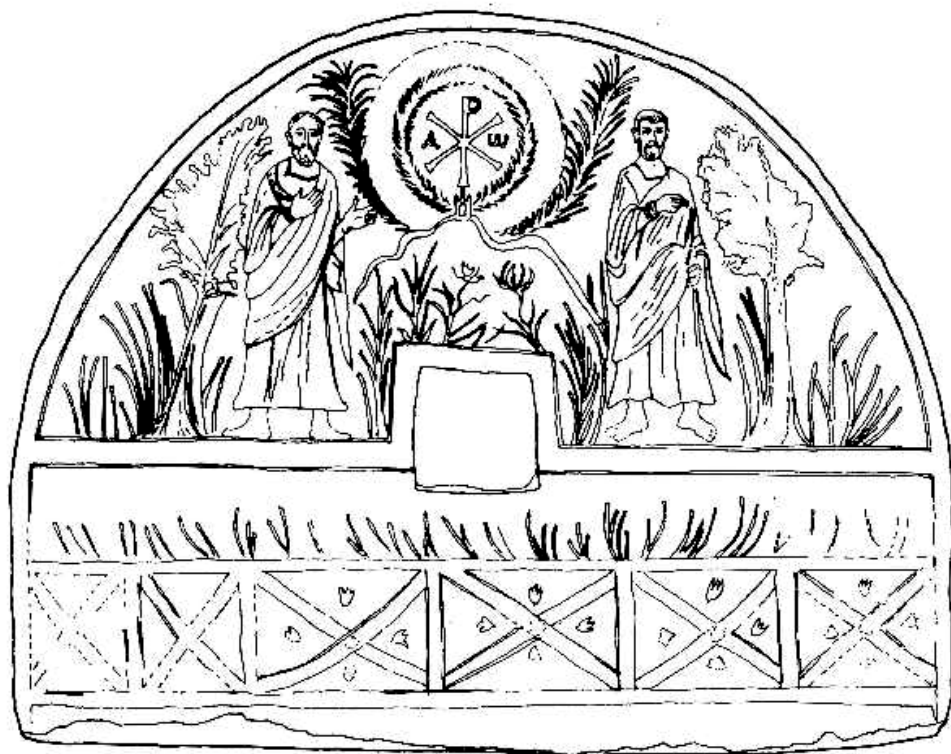


Figure 83 A drawing of the main wall from the the early Christian burial chamber in Jagodin Mala (Serbia)



Figure 84 The main wall of an early Christian burial chamber in Thessaloniki



Figure 85 Wall painting with Christogram and its reconstruction from Aquincum (Hungary)



Figure 86 The Three Youths in the Fiery Furnace from the Catacomb of Priscilla in Rome



Figure 87 The Adoration of the Magi from the Catacomb of Priscilla in Rome



Figure 88 The Epitaph of Severa (Vatican Museums)

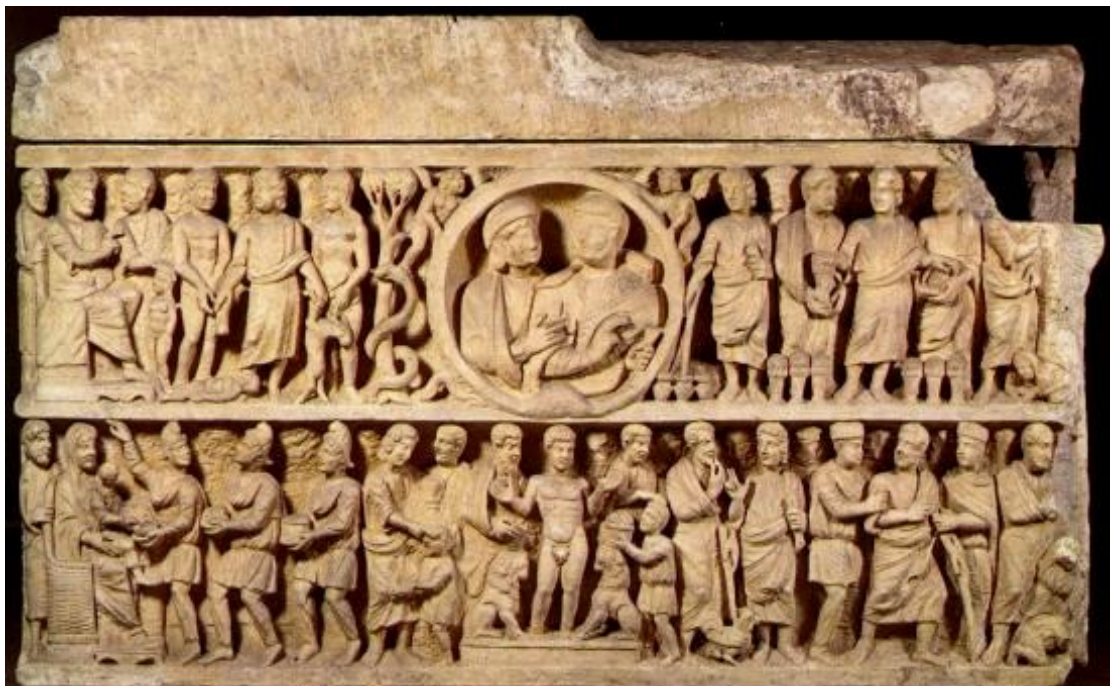


Figure 89 The 'Dogmatic' Sarcophagus (Vatican Museums)



Figure 90 Detail of the other 'Dogmatic' Sarcophagus (Arles)



Figure 91 The Adoration of the Magi in the Catacomb of Marcus and Marcellianus in Rome



Figure 92 The sarcophagus of Marcia Romana Celsa (Arles, France)



Figure 93 Detail of the sarcophagus from St Gilles du Gard (France)



Figure 94 The Adoration of the Magi on the Catervus sarcophagus (Tolentino Cathedral)



Figure 95 The Magi in Herodes' court on the sarcophagus of Flavius Julius Catervus (Tolentino Cathedral)



Figure 96 The Case Romane on the Celian Hill in Rome



Figure 97 Marble incrustation in the Case Romane (Rome)

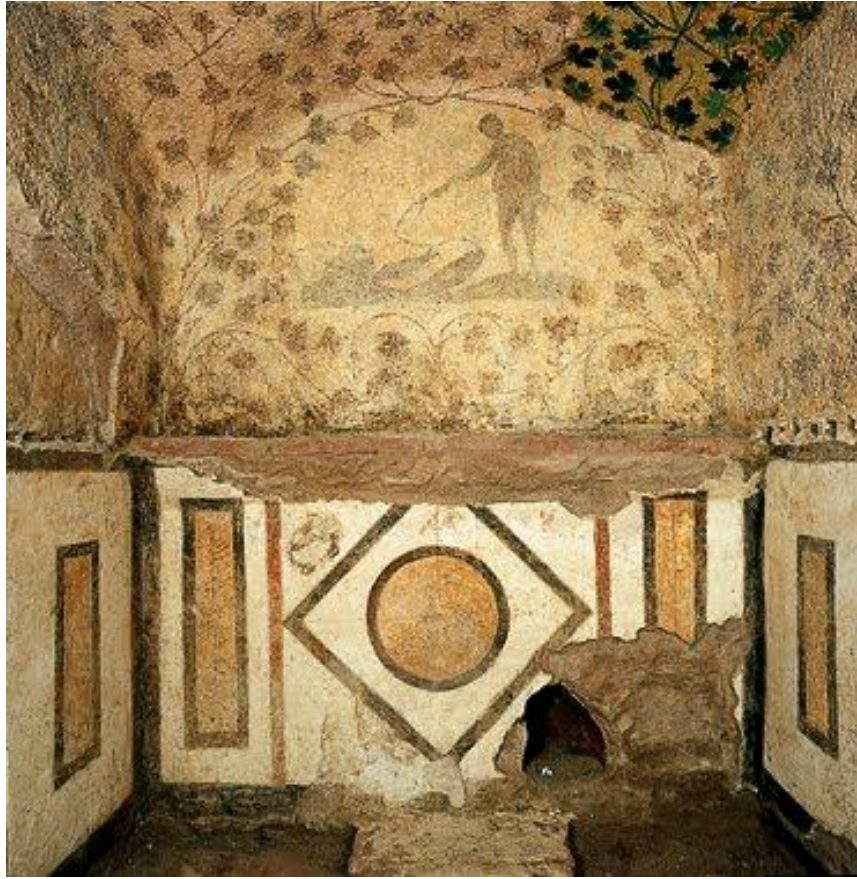


Figure 98 Marble incrustation on the eastern wall of Mausoleum M (of the Iulii) in the Vatican Necropolis (Vatican City)



Figure 99 Glass jar from Pannonia (4th century)